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Jennifer Lorn

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# JENNIFER LORN:

## *A Sedate Extravaganza.*

By

ELINOR WYLIE.

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*Currite ducentes sub tegmina, currite fusi.*

CATULL.

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COMPLETE HEREIN IN THREE BOOKS.

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Illuminating episodes in the lives of  
THE HON. GERALD POYNYARD  
and his BRIDE.

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Jennifer Lorn. II

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*Book One:* GERALD







## *Book One: GERALD*

### *1. A GROSS OF BRASS KNOCKERS*



WHEN Warren Hastings became Governor-General of India in the year 1773, he had among his associates a young man whose abilities, if somewhat less than those of his chief, were so peculiarly marked that Hastings soon found it necessary to decide whether this person was to be broken as an enemy or raised to the illustrious eminence of a friend. Having fixed upon the latter course, the great man never regretted his choice, and the able associate was content to remain just that and nothing more, knowing very well that though under other circumstances he might himself have joined the perilous and thinning ranks of great men, his own position was far safer and only a little less lucrative in the long run.

The Honourable Gerald Poynyard was the heir to a barony whose extreme antiquity was the only satisfactory thing about it, and at an early age he made up his mind finally and firmly that the other satisfactory things of life were so essential to his happiness that he could even bring himself to work, and to work hard, in order to obtain them. In his day and generation, this was an idea so original and

surprising that Gerald, at one time, came very near to being regarded as the black sheep of an otherwise respectable family, but his almost immediate acquisition of vast sums of money did much to remove this prejudice from the minds of his more critical aunts and cousins.

The natural question raised by these gentry was, "Why doesn't Gerald make a good match?" but to this he had always the same answer: "Because I happen to want a beautiful wife." Suggestions that beauty and money might sometimes be found in exquisitely balanced portions he pooh-poohed, reminding his relatives that the smallness of his estates and the largeness of his nose forbade any such plan unless he was willing to make a victim of some romantic ward in Chancery, or discover a banker's daughter who weighed in at less than thirteen stone. His father, having no choice whatever in the matter, gave in with a good grace, and let the boy have his own way, remarking only that since decent class distinctions seemed to count for nothing in Gerald's estimation, it was a pity that he was tossing aside a splendid career in the diplomatic service to become a clerk in the East India Company.

Gerald considered his three years at Cambridge sadly wasted; he took a deep interest in Greek History and nourished a secret passion for mathematics, but on the whole his university career was a mere marking of time, chiefly memorable for the extreme pleasure he took in the Newmarket Races and for several visits to the continent during the Long Vacation. During these visits he perfected his knowledge of French; it was customary among his friends to say that Gerald's accent was the best possible

earnest of the stainless aristocracy of his acquaintance in that delightful country. As early as 1765 he was a familiar figure at the more exclusive coffee-houses in London; he possessed a sort of cold and deadly skill at gaming, seldom exercised, but almost never without success.

In this same year, when he was barely twenty, he first appeared at Versailles, where his odd but distinguished type won him a decided measure of appreciation from the various societies into which the good offices of his connections easily introduced him. Perhaps these connections still hoped that he would have the wisdom to select a wife from among Parisian banking circles rather than to haunt the court in a determined pursuit of knowledge of the morals and manners of the *haute noblesse* of France; if so they were disappointed. He was polite to the bankers and tax farmers; they found him charming, and honoured his small draughts with real pleasure, but he never looked at their daughters' faces however gallantly he bowed over their hands. At the court he deliberately attached himself to certain ladies of great but diminishing beauty; as they were all at least twenty years older than he they possibly knew more about the ways of the world than he did at the beginning of their association; it is certain that at the end what little he did not understand about life at the French court could have been written upon the proverbial sixpence.

At Versailles he was accepted without question as a young and clever Englishman of good family; his great height, the prominence of his pale blue eyes, and his thin bony nose satisfied the recognised conception of an Englishman, and with the help of

a fair skin, and thick hair shining flaxen under the powder, he passed for handsome. Agreeable he undoubtedly was; highly agreeable, with perfect manners, not too strikingly in evidence, and a wit just subtle and serene enough to please those most capacious critics. He had a fine figure, and when he had money he was generous with it. Altogether, he was rather more than liked. There is a spirited portrait of him in one of Voltaire's most famous letters, written at this time. He is introduced as "a young Englishman, truly intelligent." This, from Voltaire, is much, but no more than the truth.

Upon attaining his majority, Gerald immediately applied for and received the position of clerk in the East India Company. The consternation of his family has already been dwelt upon; it is only necessary to add that his creditable record at the University, and his really brilliant successes at Versailles made the blow all the more crushing. When he left Cambridge, the preceding year, his most influential cousin had informed him that the Diplomatic Service might have been founded for no other purpose than to give scope to his indisputable talents; even going so far as to state, in a stage whisper, that he was practically authorised to offer him a small but honourable post at the court of Saxony. Gerald asked what stipend he might expect, and on being enlightened as to what his cousin assured him was an unimportant point, sniffed loudly and disdainfully. A year later he was in Calcutta.

Gerald, who loved all courts except the smaller German ones, was now in a counting-house; but he had reached the counting-house by way of many courts, amusing and various as the jewelled stars



and ribbons which they had bestowed upon this young and ingratiating foreigner. Following a week of amazing luck at White's, the results of which were augmented by a modest, but timely, bequest from an adoring old nurse, he discovered that he was in possession of sufficient funds to travel at least part of the way to India in the proper style for the Grand Tour; while he traversed Europe by the lengthy and circuitous route of his own choosing he was in all respects the young nobleman setting forth to see the world. This curious circumstance, taken in conjunction with the fact that the same sum of money invested in the business of a merchant in Spanish wines or a new and progressive banking house in the City would have given Gerald a tiny but assured income for the rest of his life, might lead the ignorant to suspect him of profligacy and extravagance. This was not the case; he was simply investing the money in himself, with a nice appreciation of his own powers. By the time Gerald took ship at Marseilles, his brocades and velvets were wearing threadbare and his purse was exceedingly depleted, but he had polished his French *ad unguem*, and given the last perfect twist to his swordsmanship; improved the soundness of his chess in Germany and heightened its brilliance in Italy; shot bears in the Pyrenees with Spanish peasants and sharpened his steely wits against the best brains in Europe. After buying a complete outfit at the proper shops in Marseilles, an outfit including such delicate linens and nankeens that he shuddered to contemplate them in the aguish grip of the *mistral* under a sky which set his teeth on edge, he spent his every penny on chincona bark, six dozen bottles

of the finest brandy, and the works of Voltaire bound in dark rose-coloured morocco and having his own arms blind-tooled on the covers at an extra cost of twelve louis. Then he boarded an East Indiaman, and, passing Gibraltar under a tiger-striped December sunset, looked his last on British soil until he landed on a mud bank in the Hoogli.

He had made all the necessary arrangements with the East India Company; aboard the ship his passage had been taken for him, and the voyage passed pleasantly enough. His fellow passengers were dull in the extreme; a sandy-haired Scotchman, going out to the same counting-house in Calcutta, was soon driven to saturnine and scornful silence by Gerald's godless conversation; two ingenuous youths, destined for military service in the Sepoy army of the Company, began by assuming airs of superiority and ended in a state of abject fear which threw them into paroxysms of laughter at the subtlest and most abstruse of his jokes, which they invariably failed to comprehend and which were invariably directed against themselves. The Scotchman often wanted to laugh, but his conscience forbade. Gerald would have been wretched without the brandy and *Candide*; with the help of these the long blue days and black silver nights melted away like a dream.

When he woke in the counting-house, he was very wide awake indeed; he was greedy for work, tireless, watchful, terrible with a sort of guarded and restrained passion. He was quickly promoted. As he rose his associates came to fear him. The Scotchman, Macallister, maintained he was the devil, and Macallister feared him less than the others did. Oddly enough, the natives adored him;

in dealing with them he always drew the velvet glove over the exceeding hardness of his hand, but the same hand was there, the same texture and weight of iron. Going out in 1766, at the age of twenty-one, he was from the first a marked man; his aristocratic connections and his striking appearance probably contributed to his success, but in the main it was the result of sheer ability and the cold and enduring determination to encompass certain ends. His health was astonishing; during his seven years as an employé of the East India Company he lost every scrap of fat with which European cooking had padded his bones; his freckled face grew as yellow as his hair; his predatory hands were claws, and yet he was never ill, never even tired; he combined the work of a navvy and a prime minister, and throve upon it. Soon he was the recognised ambassador to the more peevish of the native princes, his perfect firmness and impeccable suavity made him invaluable to the Company and acceptable to the most pampered of rajahs. Here was a man who had every grace, every accomplishment; a man whose chess was as magnificent as his marksmanship; a man who could manage a horse or a political intrigue with light and masterly touch; a man who had no fear and who was beginning to have a great deal of money.

In 1772, the year before Warren Hastings became Governor-General, Gerald was considerably more than beginning; he already had a great deal of money, and he was a distinct power in India. The Company recognised this fact, and profited by it; Gerald was well satisfied to be made use of by the Company, so long as he was permitted to

make use of India. He was now twenty-seven years old, and in one way or another he had managed to save fifty thousand pounds. Into some of the other ways it is perhaps best not to inquire, but his worst enemies never accused him of lack of industry, ingenuity, or intelligence. Taking it all in all, it may be said that Gerald earned his money.

He was now determined to use his fortune to the best advantage; before investing it he wished to make certain acquisitions and to fulfil certain ambitions. They were singularly definite; they included the purchase of four cream-coloured horses from one rajah, and a string of pearls from a second; these he obtained, together with one magnificent diamond and a small palace of marble, gilded under the sun and frosted silver by moonlight, the forfeited property of the richest native merchant whom the Company had succeeded in ruining that year. It stood on the outskirts of Calcutta, where the houses were all of dressed stone, drab and low, and as it was new and shining and white it looked very cool and beautiful above the yellow Hoogli.

Having deserved well of the Company, Gerald had no difficulty in arranging for a year's leave of absence and his passage home. It was generally understood that he was going back to England to be married; when offered congratulations he accepted them simply and affably, without troubling to explain that as yet he had not selected his future wife. Indeed, he was hardly himself aware of this fact, so very real and clearly defined was his own idea of the lady he was about to wed. After making a few more purchases, which included hangings of indigo and silver for the more important rooms

of the palace, and an uncut sapphire of great size and beauty, he again took ship, sailing this time straight for England. On board the East India-man he was the object of much adulation; this annoyed him greatly until, remembering his former experience, he decided to re-read *Candide* and drink brandy; the weather was like his own sapphire taken out of its ivory box and dissolved in sunlight; he sat on deck, upon cushions of scarlet silk with a snow-white awning like a great cloud between him and the sky, and though the quality of the brandy left something to be desired, he had never enjoyed *Candide* half so much.

Gerald was an excellent sailor; the Bay of Biscay upset him only because his servants were all seasick. Upon arriving at Bordeaux his equanimity was completely restored by a delightful addition to the ship's company, a young Frenchman of good family and a refined taste in literature and wine. The last quart of brandy had been requisitioned in the middle of a violent storm to save the life of a female passenger; only the heavier tragedies of Voltaire, which he had never cared for, remained to be read. The appearance of a youthful Parisian, mad with joy at escaping from the offices of the Bordeaux wine-merchant whom he had the ill fortune to own as an uncle, and to whom his mother had sent him in a moment of insensate sisterly affection; a youthful Parisian transported with happiness at the prospect of meeting his fiancée in London, and carrying with him to beguile the tedium of the voyage four cases of superb claret and the first published writings of Mirabeau; this was indeed a welcome distraction. Gerald was almost



sorry when the grey shape of the Lizard raised its lighthouse and threw a shattered beam of gold into his searching eyes.

Hiring a chaise at Gravesend, he drove straight to the London house of his most influential cousin, who in the course of seven years had shrunk and stiffened in an alarming manner. Nevertheless, he appeared overjoyed at the sight of Gerald, in whom his perspicuity recognised a potential influence even greater than his own. This lean and yellow young man, shivering on the doorstep with his new bottle-green greatcoat huddled around him, was magnificent in the chrysalis, cold as yet, and torpid, but with the germ of glory concealed somewhere among the folds of stiff cloth, like the golden guineas hidden in the obscure cavern of his pocket. Lady Dicker, who had herself shrunk and softened almost out of knowledge, hurried downstairs with her hair unpowdered and a puce-coloured satin dressing-gown hastily thrown about her shoulders; she begged her dear cousin to regard their home as his during his sojourn in England. "At least you'll stay the night?" she besought.

But Gerald would trespass on their generous hospitality no further than to partake of a glass of sherry and to warm his toes in front of the study fire while his cousin informed him as to the schedule of stages on the Exeter Road. Gerald was going down to Basingstoke immediately to see his poor old father. He had not remembered that the month of April was so chilly in England. Yes, he was glad to be home, but it was cold; devilish cold. And he threw another log on the study fire and swallowed another glass of sherry. In the panelled

hall his two turbaned servants shuddered with chattering teeth, their feet drawn up from the black and white marble floor.

After a wretched journey by stage to Basingstoke, and a delicious drive in the best hired gig that town afforded, through a spring landscape laced with bloom, Gerald arrived at the quaint hamlet of Camphileden, and stood once more upon his father's doorstep. An east wind blew a shower of frail petals about him; the servants, whom the carter was bringing, along with the seventeen portmantaux and two sole-leather trunks, shivered so violently that they were unable to admire the black-thorn hedges; but Gerald was enchanted with everything. A blossoming cherry tree in a sheltered southern corner of the garden sent him into the house with an ecstatic smile upon his wooden countenance; the white hyacinths almost moved him to song. Lord Camphile met his son with an aggrieved air; he had a bad cold in his head, but his gout was somewhat improved. Otherwise he had altered very little; Gerald found him looking rather younger than the most sanguine of filial hopes had seemed to warrant.

Gerald was properly pleased to see his poor old father looking so well; he was now far too important a personage in his own right to have any lurking regrets about that. In India he was Poynyard; he thought of himself as Poynyard and, when he considered the subject at all, felt distinctly annoyed at the idea of suddenly becoming Camphile. It was a real satisfaction to see his father in such excellent health, and to know that the poor old man was no more than fifty-six years of age and might reason-



ably be expected to live for some time. He wrung his father's hand with unaffected warmth, and observing that the paternal dressing-gown was slightly frayed, decided to replace it as soon as possible by a much finer one of dark blue brocade with a wine-coloured cord and tassels.

In the morning Gerald rode into Basingstoke on the only decent mount his father's vast stables contained; the pretty little mare had originally belonged to a sporting farmer who, unable to pay his entire rent of fifty pounds for one farm and three peppercorns for another, had left Dolly and the peppercorns at Camphileden and driven away cursing behind his flea-bitten grey. Lord Camphile was thoroughly disgusted, but the solitary stable-boy was the happiest man in Hampshire; no lapidary ever polished a gem with a more meticulous care than the delighted Hodge henceforward bestowed upon the smoothing and sleeking of Dolly's silken coat. Gerald, riding into town through flowery fields, himself attired like the lilies in dazzling brown boots, cream-coloured breeches, and a pale grey coat with gilt buttons, had no reason to feel ashamed of Dolly; she shone brighter than his boots.

Gerald went immediately to his father's agent, who since the decline of the Camphile fortunes had been forced to eke out his meagre income with the help of a solicitor's business in Basingstoke. Mr. Jackson received the young heir obsequiously; at the end of half an hour's close conference he was in a state of trembling rapture. "A thousand pounds will do wonders . . . wonders!" he kept repeating, and wished he might add, "your Lordship," for he had no love for Gerald's father, nor indeed for

any impoverished person other than himself. Gerald broke away from his eager conjectures about the relative merits of whitewash applied to the outside of cottages and oaken joists applied within; the young man now visited a wine-merchant's, the best in Basingstoke, but in so humble a way of business that his webbed and furry bottles failed to satisfy the exigencies of his customer's taste. However, he was permitted to dispatch a case of port to Camphileden, together with a small quantity of really good brandy which the worthy fellow had secured at an executors' sale. His claret was impossible; Gerald, who drank no other wine, lost no time in sending a large order by post to one of the leading London houses. That night, at dinner, his father begged him to help him finish the second bottle of Basingstoke port; he refused with the utmost politeness and hauteur, though he knew it to be a very good wine indeed. He sniffed thankfully at the brandy in his own glass before swallowing it.

Lord Camphile indulged in one curious affectation; he persisted in treating his son as a failure. Gerald would have been keenly annoyed by this absurdity had it not happened to appeal to his rather sardonic sense of humour. To hear his father's constant references to the disgraceful depth of commercial careers and the ridiculous height of counting-house stools was merely amusing to him, who had sat on cloth of gold among swansdown cushions and diplomatically allowed a prince to beat him at chess; even his father's seat in the House of Lords was lowly compared to a swaying howdah perched on the back of some crimson-caparisoned

royal elephant, and he had placed many more bullets behind tigers' ears than pens behind his own. Therefore he could afford to laugh at his father, and he did. But on the whole the two managed to agree fairly well, and the next month passed very pleasantly.

The weather was all that could be expected of April, and the workmen made good headway with their whitewashing of cob walls and thatching of roofs; the village became so tidy that the high street looked like a Dutch toy. Gallons of green paint were splashed upon front doors, and it was said that Gerald had ordered a gross of brass knockers from London. This was the famous year in which a local wit recalled the ancient form of the hamlet's name; Camphile Eden; saying that in spite of a serpent he might mention being the cause of it all, they had damn near gone back to Bible days what with rose-bushes and clean curtains. To every one's surprise Gerald took the matter up eagerly, not with a cane, as some people had expected, but with energy and enthusiasm and the help of that submerged antiquarian, the Vicar of Saint Cuthbert's. Soon the village found itself with a name which seemed as new and disturbing as the brass knockers; a name split into two parts and therefore just twice as hard to write, as the schoolmaster told various indignant inquirers. Nevertheless, the name, being Gerald's choice, stood, and probably stands till this day, and if you look close enough at a map of Hampshire you may perhaps find it so written: Camphile Eden.

The Hall itself, so-called, although it was in reality no more than a little grey dower-house, of

crude and unfashionable Tudor construction, was given a charming new face of blushing rose-coloured brick; an improvement so manifest, at least from the south lawn, that Gerald almost ceased to regret the enormous Elizabethan pile which had been destroyed during the Great Rebellion much to the annoyance of his grandfather's grandfather. That gentleman, known severally to his friends and foes as Handsome Phil Camphile and the Devil's Twin, was said to have greeted the disagreeable tidings of the burning and sacking of his country-seat with the sprightly comment that he could bear the loss of the Towers; the cellars were all he really cared about. Gerald, examining the gigantic blocks of calcined stone, the heaps of blackened bricks, decided that the house must have been an example of the worst possible taste, barbarous and shocking in the extreme; he had made up his mind then and there to have some competent architect build him a suitable mansion, on this same site, as soon as he had saved a little more money. And he reflected comfortably that owing to the unusual nature of his Indian investments, into which it might be instructive but alarming to inquire, his fifty thousand pounds was still fifty thousand pounds and perhaps a trifle over, in spite of the fact that he had spent rather lavishly of late. The Adam brothers, of whom he had heard great things, would be the very men if he could afford them; they would understand to perfection the chaste and stately simplicity which this landscape required to crown it. At the same time he remembered with pleasure his pretty little marble palace above the Hoogli. In the carven richness of the stones about him he could see no

beauty; on the contrary, they filled him with disgust, and he kicked a rampant lion so hard that he stubbed his toe severely in addition to ruining a particularly elegant varnished boot.

The Gardens at the Hall were already well established; Gerald's mother had found her chief solace in them after her husband ceased to interest her and she ceased to interest her son. She was a gentlewoman of fair intelligence and no little beauty, but her husband was too stupid and her son too clever to understand her, and she was forced to seek companionship among standard roses and espaliered fruit trees. The winters were her worst times; in spite of a small conservatory she died of loneliness in February, 1757. However, the roses and fruit trees survived, thanks to the devoted care of an old gardener, who had conceived a romantic love for her when she first came to Camphile Hall fifteen years before, and who watched her yellow hair turn silver-streaky with a sort of dumb and helpless agony; if she had been a rose he could have blown strong smoke from his pipe and killed the trouble; for a dying lady he could do nothing. But in 1772, when the old man was nearly ninety, her gardens were a living marvel.

Gerald had the interior of the Hall redecorated in the fresh and delicate style of the period; he employed labour from Basingstoke, and a local architect, who had the sense to recognise his client's faultless taste and to profit by it. The expense was not great, but the effect was charming. The green morning-room was especially successful, though the white parlour on a sunny afternoon elicited more praise from the general run of calling ladies. The



library was left untouched, partly out of respect for Lord Camphile, but mainly because Gerald realised that the chairs, if done at all, should be done in morocco; a needless waste of money which could be used to better advantage elsewhere. On his next trip to London he acquired some exquisite peach-blow porcelain and the *Fermiers Generaux* edition of La Fontaine.

The entire county called, first out of curiosity and then again out of sheer amazement; presently Gerald was very much in demand. Reports of his vast wealth were circulated on all sides; at Lady Andover's *fête champêtre* he was mobbed. During the months of May and June he did not dine at home more than half a dozen times, and then with a distinguished company about him. His clothes were impeccable, his manners consummate, his poise beyond praise. Many daughters of good houses shook with fearful delight in his presence; he seemed a fairy prince, with just enough of the ogre about him to make him totally irresistible. But there was never anything to resist; Gerald remained unmoved.

Meanwhile, it must not be supposed that London offered no attractions to the returned wanderer; the influential cousin saw to it that London should. Sir Richard Dicker, or Cousin Dick, as with a double inevitability he was known to half the peerage, baronetage, and landed gentry of Great Britain, saw no reason whatever why Camphile's boy should vegetate in a deserted village. Without wishing to dwell too lovingly on the riches of his young kinsman, lest Parliament's already somewhat nervous interest in the East India Company be aroused to

a pitch commensurate with that which caused the Governor-General of India much inconvenience at a later date, he nevertheless allowed it to be understood that Gerald was able to support a well-born wife in a style far beyond that to which she had been accustomed. No unnecessary questions were answered, or indeed asked, for to most people's minds it was much more suitable that Baron Camphile's son and heir should possess a hundred thousand pounds than that he should not. A hundred thousand was the figure at which Gerald's fortune was commonly reported, and by a curious and pleasing coincidence that was the figure at which it actually stood in August, 1772, thanks to the quite unprecedented luck attending certain obscure Indian investments. Warren Hastings, getting wind of these negotiations, considered very seriously the advisability of having a warrant sworn out for Gerald's arrest immediately upon the latter's return to India, but thinking better of it, decided instead to accept the young man as a trusted associate; a decision which, as has been said before, the great man never had cause to regret. But in 1772 there was as yet no Governor-General in India, and Hastings was still sweating in Calcutta while Gerald was making his bow at St. James's.

His experiences of court life were very different from the brief and glittering dreams which had engaged his youthful fancy at Versailles; his sovereign's quiet domestic life, though varied by intervals of insanity, was too essentially German to interest Gerald; he did far better during the days of the Regency, which really suited him and permitted his magnificence to shine forth unobscured



by the stupidities of bad manners and good morals. At present he found much to amuse him, but little to charm; he began to think that English life was not for him, and spoke seriously of removing to Paris and marrying the daughter of one of his old French friends.

"There was a little Solange," he used to say, "who was utterly charming at eleven years of age; she would now be just eighteen. Her mother was the wittiest and possibly the most beautiful woman I ever knew; her father . . . well, he had not too much to bequeath in the way of brains, perhaps, though I come near to committing *lese majesté* in suggesting it . . . but if the best blood in France can be said to count, the little Solange should be all that there is of the most exquisite." And he would sigh gently, smoothing an invisible wrinkle out of his silk stocking. In the main, he found the English ladies handsome and extremely dull; at the great Whig houses where his cousin introduced him he had every opportunity of judging, and as in Hampshire he was *persona grata* among the leading county families, it may fairly be said that Gerald deserved the criticism which was undoubtedly made. He was, indeed, absurdly hard to please.

"My dear sir, what I require is something very different from any of these excellent females," he remarked to his father one evening in late July, as the two sat sipping their wine in the panelled dining-room, fresh-painted a clear yellowish white which showed up the new Chinese Chippendale chairs to much advantage. The western windows were open, and Gerald was not so deeply preoccupied with his *Château Margaux* as to render him incapa-

ble of appreciating the shining lemon-coloured sky or the scent of a charming shell-pink climbing rose which he had saved from the builders' vandalism at the slight cost of horsewhipping a day-labourer and threatening a carpenter's apprentice with a pocket-pistol. "The country ladies are all too red, the London ladies too pasty, when they are not rouged out of all resemblance to humanity. Nevertheless, I prefer these last to the Blowsibellas of our own sweet countryside. I suppose when I venture into Cornwall next week I shall be suffocated in an atmosphere of clotted cream and over-ripe apple cheeks. God damn Dicker and all his cousins!"

He had upon his Chinese Bristol plate a superb bunch of white currants; when he held them up to the light they were like a little cluster of grapes, translucent, veined with green and amber, delicate as fruit blown in Venetian glass. He tasted a currant with pursed lips, and continued the conversation; his father was silent.

"I most certainly have no hope of bringing home a bride from Saint Mary's; I may possibly acquire one of Dick's Hereford bulls to improve our wretched breed; beyond that I have no plan, other than my invincible determination to limit my visit to a week's time. The fact that my mother used occasionally to spend the Christmas holidays at the Old Rectory does not appeal to me as a reason why I should be boiled to death; boiled in oil I may say, in discreet reference to our worthy cousin's gift for flattery. Thank Heaven that my engagements for August are so numerous that they will require my absence in Scotland during the whole of that month; the devil take the probability that Dick's

are precisely the same. If I find myself in his company on some lonely grouse-moor, I warn you, sir, in all gravity, that there will be considerable danger of a fatal shooting mishap."

He ate another currant and laughed. "I feel no alarm," said Lord Camphile, after which ambiguous comment he fell asleep. Gerald rang for the butler. "Brinton," he commanded, "I desire you to inform Mrs. Barnes that the remainder of that excellent saddle of mutton is under no consideration to suffer metamorphosis into a shepherd's pie; in that eventuality I should be forced to take steps which would be painful both to myself and to Mrs. Barnes; Mohammed will curry the mutton."

"Yes, sir; very good, sir," said Brinton. "Gerald," said Lord Camphile, waking up, "I should like a little, minced on toast." "My dear father," said Gerald, "it is ever my pleasurable duty to yield to your slightest wish; Brinton, you hear what your master says." With which he rose smiling from the table, and spent the evening pacing softly up and down the east terrace, inhaling snuff and watching the full moon as she languidly detached herself from a tangle of beech trees in Camphile Eden Bower.



## 2. *THE EARL'S ELZEVIR*



SIR RICHARD DICKER was the son of a clergyman; his father had been the Reverend Sir Ambrose Dicker, Rector of Saint Mary Pengwynne's in Cornwall. A deserving cousin now held the living, but the Old Rectory, a commodious dwelling of the Jacobean period, had been purchased by Dick as a country retreat, endeared to him by childish memories; he needed some such haven of rest in the intervals of his London activities, and thoroughly enjoyed the small farm which was attached to the place and managed for him by a reliable resident agent. The New Rectory was much better suited to the present incumbent's requirements; a well-built modern house with a good kitchen-garden and neat lawns, in the shadow of Saint Mary's tower, it enabled him to keep up the proper appearances without making unnecessary inroads upon his slender resources; unlike his predecessor, he was entirely dependent upon the living. The Dickers showed him every possible kindness, and he dined with them at least four times a year; he was a widower with several young children, and an agreeable person in all respects save the very poor quality of his play at whist.

The village of Saint Mary Pengwynne was so close to the borders of Devon that the surrounding landscape possessed rather the green and luxuriant

quality associated with the latter county than Cornwall's own air of wild and rugged grandeur. The Old Rectory was situated among scenes of surpassing beauty; Gerald was pleased in spite of himself, and when he was pleased his manner was enchanting. The local gentry were impressed, those who dined at the Old Rectory the first evening of his stay pronounced him delightful; the second evening he was called distinguished; it was not until the third that the disappointed mother of three lovely girls labelled him morose.

The next morning at breakfast his brow was dark and corrugated; he hardly touched the kedgerec which his own servant had prepared for him. Dick talked of Hereford bulls with patient cheerfulness; his wife remained discreetly silent as she poured the tea. After Gerald had drunk five cups he commented upon the pretty Chelsea porcelain; his hosts breathed again, and Mohammed went out into the Italian garden and wept for joy.

"Dear boy," said Dick courageously, "you have heard me speak of my Devonshire cousins."

"Often," said Gerald.

"The Nevilles and the Cleverlys," said Dick.

"Just so," said Gerald. But he consented to ride over to Cleverly-Neville that afternoon.

"You'll like Tam-Linn; he has the finest library in the United Kingdom." Dick was growing venturesome.

"Oh, yes," said Gerald, "I know the man well. He tricked me out of an Elzevir Cicero; an intelligent fellow. I'm engaged to help slaughter his game in August. But what the devil is a Scotch Earl doing in Devon?"



"His wife was a Cleverly," Dick informed him proudly; Gerald nodded with perfect politeness.

"And his daughter is the most beautiful girl in Devonshire." This time Dick had gone too far; Gerald rose without a word and stalked from the room.

Dick was intimidated; that afternoon at Cleverly-Neville he drove his female cousins away from Gerald as though they had been a parcel of hens striving to reach some rich and indigestible food; he felt sincerely that in the event of one of the more talkative of these ladies managing to corner Gerald, the consequences might be really dangerous. The Earl of Tam-Linn did the honours of his wife's house with true Scotch hospitality; he and Gerald had taken to each other from the moment of their first meeting, and the hours passed smoothly in the congenial discussion of the relative merits of English and French binders. Six o'clock came, with lengthening stripes of darker green across the shaven turf; the tree-tops rustled in the sweet airs of evening, the sky was silver and gold. Within the library the cloudy amber sunlight gave lustre to glazed leather and gilt lettering; the Chinese brocade which covered the chairs flashed into spider-web patterns of tinsel thread traced upon orange and dull blue. "Perfection; complete perfection," murmured Gerald as Lord Tam-Linn placed a marvellously-preserved palimpsest of Vergil in his long thin hands. The earl was much gratified by his young guest's unaffected admiration for this treasure, but Gerald was not referring to the book alone; the room with its oak panels, faintly gilt along the mouldings, its Chinese brocades, its *Famille Jaune* vases on the

carven chimney-piece under the portrait of a lady by Sir Peter Lely, all these things appealed to his passion for perfection; the smell of Russia leather and of pot-pourri perfumed the fresh breeze fluttering the curtains, the sound of a spinet tinkled from above; the only jarring note was Lord Tam-Linn's loud voice roughening the "r" in Vergil. Presently this was removed; its owner had gone to look for the Elzevir Cicero. Gerald drew a long breath of relief.

"Our good friend hardly deserves this exquisite house; his own top-heavy granite castle of Carterhaugh suits him far better. After all, there is nothing to touch these little Queen Anne manors for the nice combination of beauty and comfort." He turned his head upon the high cushioned back of his chair and closed his eyes for one luxurious instant; when he opened them again he was looking straight out of the window at a young girl who leaned upon the sundial; the cloudy sunlight fell faint and diluted upon her burnished head.

Her hair was red-gold, looped and curled in innumerable ringlets; unpowdered and unbound, its brightness was amazing. She wore a dress of cream-coloured muslin; against her pale blue sash certain petals of a large cream-coloured rose drooped defined, the rest melted into the tinted fabric of her bodice. Her eyes were dark, dark grey or hazel contrasting strangely with a skin of singular fairness; her features were formed in lines of the most wistful and appealing beauty, delicate and clear.

"In the name of God, who is that girl!" cried Gerald in a strained and choking voice. "That," said Dick coolly, "is my little cousin, Jennifer Lorn."

Jennifer Lorn was the most beautiful girl in Devonshire; indeed, with the possible exception of a few Genoese and Sicilian peasants and a shawled colleen or two in Galway, she was the most beautiful girl in the world. At this time she was exactly seventeen years old; as her father preferred to spend his money upon first editions there is no contemporary portrait of her in existence; the vision of her early loveliness faded from reality like dew licked up by the sun. The miniature which Gerald ordered in Paris a year later was destroyed during the Revolution; its owner had not the heart to claim it on his return from the East in 1773, and it remained in the artist's hands for twenty years before Fouquier-Tinville chanced to see it lying in the blood and mud of the streets; because it smiled so innocently at him he ground it under his boot. As the old miniature painter's head had just fallen into the basket, the incident appeared unimportant at the time, but now it seems a pity that the little ivory oval did not survive the Reign of Terror, as by all accounts it must have been not only an excellent likeness but a delicate and distinguished work of art.

The daughter of the Earl of Tam-Linn and the Honourable Clarinda Cleverly-Neville, Jennifer was almost bound to be a beauty, but no one could have foreseen the remarkable success with which she contrived to fuse and combine the good looks of both families into an exquisite concord quite her own. Tam-Linn was now nearing seventy; he was still an extremely handsome man; a lean Scot, tall and proud and very fierce, with bright eyes and bright red hair as yet hardly dimmed by grey. Jennifer



had taken his eyes and hair and made them more amazing; she had taken as much of his height as she needed, and the scornful lift of his forehead, and his long throat, and his slenderness. But she had rejected his harsh burring voice; she had rejected his nervous energy and a good half of his brains. From her mother she had chosen a charming languor, a complexion of rose and cream, little bones, and soft flesh to lie sparingly over them; her hands and feet were her mother's, and so were her laziness and her good nature. She had her mother's minute teeth and extravagant eyelashes; if she had ever grown plump she would have had her mother's dimples too, but the Lorn blood running wild and chilly in her veins kept her thin and clear as green leaves in April.

Beside her beauty, she had all manner of engaging tricks and traits; people smiled when she spoke, and the more susceptible, seeing her praying in church on Sunday, were not infrequently moved to tears. But she was neither very strong nor very clever; the suave warm air of Devon tended to increase her natural lassitude, and none of her governesses had taught her more than the use of the globes, a little music, and the ability to converse unintelligently in French and German. However, her accent in each language was beyond reproach; her singing voice, a strange little muffled contralto, had been so far neglected that it remained quite adorable, and her touch upon the spinet was too light and casual to be really distressing. She was excessively fond of sitting upon a garden seat and reading Bishop Percy's *Reliques*; she would have preferred to lie down in the grass under the shade

of the copper beeches, but this was forbidden owing to the supposed delicacy of Cleverly-Neville chests, long her mother's excuse for protracted absences from Carterhaugh. This lady shared her daughter's taste for poetry, but she was perfectly satisfied with garden seats and the works of Mr. Gray and Mr. Goldsmith; she was much more intellectual than Jennifer, and a valued friend of Sir Horace Walpole's. In her youth she had been romantic; to marry Tam-Linn was a more adventurous manner of indulging a passion for Scotch history than a mere reading of Bishop Percy's ballads. In her early married life she had found Caxton's Malory among her husband's books and forthwith insisted that her infant daughter should be christened Guinevere in the parish church of Cleverly-Neville; Tam-Linn insisted that the child should be baptised by the minister at Carterhaugh, and given the name of Janet; they compromised upon Jennifer, an old Neville name. A journey to Scotland during a particularly wet April proved impossible under the circumstances, but Tam-Linn was allowed to call his daughter Jenny.

The more robust of her Carterhaugh cousins called her Jenny Forlorn; her mother was accustomed to dress her in white muslin all the year round, and this habit, though highly satisfactory from an æsthetic point of view, produced during the Scotch winters a type of sore throat which did not tend to raise the spirits. Lady Tam-Linn saw her chance and took it; Jennifer's health could not possibly support so severe a climate except for the month of August. Lady Tam-Linn was happier in Devon; Jennifer was happier in Devon; Tam-Linn himself

was happier in Devon after his wife had the most valuable portion of his library, including all his classical manuscripts and every Elzevir he possessed, removed to Cleverly-Neville. He stayed at Carterhaugh from the beginning of August until he joined his family at Christmas; his sons sometimes stayed with him, and his daughter sometimes wished she could. Had she done so, and joined the other Lorn and Carterhaugh girls in their racing and chasing over the moor, it is probable that her vitality would have been higher; it is a pity that she was not permitted to kilt her green kirtle as bravely as the original Lady Janet for whom the minister did not, after all, baptise her. Her muscles and her brains were perfectly capable of development; she should have lived in Scotland until she was sixteen and then been packed off to Oxford with her brothers, Jock and Jem; perhaps she might have struck the authorities as looking rather like a pretty girl in boy's clothes, but that, being precisely the way in which her brothers struck them, would not have mattered very much. In spite of their names, Jock and Jem were thoroughly Cleverly-Nevilles. Their mother adored them, and their father teased them and felt like a brute when their blue eyes blinked at him in polite protest. Jennifer was his favourite; he liked to see his own falcon eyes burning in her small pink and white face, and he knew instinctively that she was neither a fool nor a coward, only egregiously lazy.

"God damn my soul, the girl's even lazier than her mother!" he would say, and then he would laugh and laugh and laugh. The boys would jump in their chairs and shrink back in alarm, but neither

little Jennifer nor her mother jumped or shrank at all; they laughed too, and they were laughing at Tam-Linn. The next day, very likely, the whole family would leave for Devonshire, a full fortnight earlier than the Earl had expected. He loved the dripping rocks and spongy heather of Carterhaugh with a fierce intensity, and yet when he reached Cleverly-Neville on Christmas Eve, and kissed his wife and daughter again, he was so wild with joy at the sight of them that he could very nearly, as he himself put it, have eaten them both up like a nice little pat of butter and a nice little pot of cream.

Thus Jennifer Lorn was brought up within sight of a warm pearl-coloured sea, in a garden where the roses bloomed all winter if they had a bit of south wall to hold the sun behind them, and where the lilacs and laburnum came out so ridiculously early that your mind was never quite made up to look for them, and they carried a slight air of miracles about them every spring. She was brought up to eat bread and butter, and milk and honey, and rice pudding, and strawberry jam for a treat. She was brought up to wear frocks of fine India muslin and to tie blue ribbons about her waist; to go to church and sing hymns out of a velvet hymnal with a gilt cross on it; to sit on a green silk chair while her maid brushed her curls to splendour; to sit on a white bench and read Percy's *Reliques*; to lean over a sundial on a summer's day and wonder drowsily why she loved cream-coloured roses better than yellow ones, and why she had ever been born. This is the way in which she had been brought up, and this is the way she looked; it is easy to understand why Gerald uttered a chok-

ing cry and sprang violently to his feet when he first saw her in July, 1772, falling asleep at six o'clock on a golden-cloudy afternoon, with her red ringlets heaped like a little fire above the circle of stone.

She was precisely what he had been searching for ever since his return to England; she had been in his mind's eye all the time, correct in every detail with the possible exception of the red hair; he had imagined that her hair would be ash-blonde or pale chestnut. But that was natural enough; such a complexion had never been seen before save in combination with the fairest of flaxen tresses. He had not made the mistake of supposing that she would have blue eyes; these eyes, the colour of a thunder-storm streaked with yellow lightning, had blazed for an instant into his before the lazy eyelids covered them up, and he had known them for the most beautiful eyes in the world; he had always intended that his wife should have such eyes. He fell back rather limply against the Chinese brocade; the girl was almost too perfect. "Pretty little thing, isn't she?" Dick asked complacently. Gerald stared at him in silent disdain.

When Tam-Linn came back with the Elzevir Cicero, Gerald drew him aside. "Lord Tam-Linn," he said in a quiet, admirably-controlled voice, "I should like to ask for your permission to marry your daughter." Tam-Linn, who had thought that Gerald was going to attempt to buy the Cicero from him, was very much relieved. He had been surprised and embarrassed by the prospect of having to refuse his young friend's request; this was another matter. It never occurred to him for an instant that



Gerald had seen Jennifer for the first time just five minutes ago; he took it for granted that the acquaintance was of reasonable standing, and he knew that Gerald's own standing was rather more than that.

To tell the truth, Tam-Linn did not entirely realise his daughter's astonishing beauty; he admired plump dark-haired women, of the type of his own Clarinda. Privately he thought his child had a slightly starved and eccentric air; he gave her a great many buttered scones and girdle-cakes whenever he had the opportunity, and loved the poor girl none the less for her pathetic appearance, but of course it made a difference to him in his estimate of her matrimonial chances. As for her hair, the Black Tam-Linns had always been the handsome ones; they had square impassive faces bearing the unmistakable stamp of the blood of those southerners who once built a wall across Scotland; their cleft chins and calm brown eyes were still classic. The Earl knew what it was to be called Red by cousins who looked like Roman consuls. It always gave him a shock to see Jennifer standing knee-deep in purple-red heather with her copper-red hair streaming out against a hot blue August haze; when the high wind lifted the tangled locks and bent the heather, whistling all the while like a mad thing, he thought of witches. It comforted him to remember that the lassie would soon be old enough to wear a decent snood and a sprinkling of powder.

Therefore, it is only natural that when Gerald asked Tam-Linn for his daughter's hand, the Earl made no objection, merely remarking that he would

have to ask his wife, but that for his own part he would be thoroughly pleased to see his girl the daughter-in-law of his old friend Camphile.

As a matter of fact, Lord Camphile and he had never liked each other; still, it seemed the simplest thing to say under the circumstances, and in a rush of relief about the Elzevir, he said it with much geniality, reflecting meanwhile that he thanked his God that the real decision lay in Clarinda's province.

"Then may I have the privilege of a word with Lady Tam-Linn?" asked Gerald urbanely, but with a slight emphasis on the "Lady" which would have annoyed the Earl very much had he not been far too absent-minded to notice it, and which caused Dick to quiver with mingled joy and fear. Dick's head was swimming, but on the whole he felt great pride in his youthful kinsman; in addition to this he was conscious of a pleasing sense of triumph; he had not forgotten how haughtily Gerald had stalked from the breakfast room that morning at the mention of Jennifer's name, and he debated within himself as to the advisability of rallying the dear boy upon the subject. Just as he had reached the conclusion that after dinner was always the best time, Lady Tam-Linn appeared in the doorway.

She was a very pretty little woman, much younger than her husband; her dark hair, silvered only by its sprinkling of powder, grew into a peak on her forehead; the mingled rose and dove-colour of her dress set off her fine complexion to advantage; her small feet were almost concealed by the shining buckles on her shoes. Only her lively and satirical blue eyes made her other than the charming wax



doll whom Tam-Linn had longed to set above the incongruous savagery of Carterhaugh. He had fondly believed that because a woman had pink cheeks and plump white hands she must of necessity be pliant and docile; Clarinda was neither of these things. Under her lazy amiability she was both wilful and obstinate, but as her strongest desire in life was to make her husband and children happy, no great harm was done; she always encompassed her desire in her own way, and they soon learned to be satisfied with the sort of happiness she considered good for them, knowing very well that any other sort was simply out of the question. They were an exceptionally united family.

"My love," said Tam-Linn, "Mr. Poynyard wants to marry Jennifer."

His wife inspected Gerald closely before replying; she was still far too romantic to tolerate the thought of a mere marriage of convenience for her daughter. Lady Tam-Linn liked tall fair-haired men; she found Gerald's appearance most satisfactory, and considered his nose a mark of race, which indeed it was. His commanding presence and air of impassive and polite contempt impressed her; in a word, she thought him magnificent. She was not sufficiently vulgar-minded to allow the idea of his wealth to obtrude into her upper consciousness, but an aureate background swam behind him, throwing into cold and clear-edged relief the sharp lines of his figure, clad in metallic grey, with shimmering buttons on a coat the colour of steel.

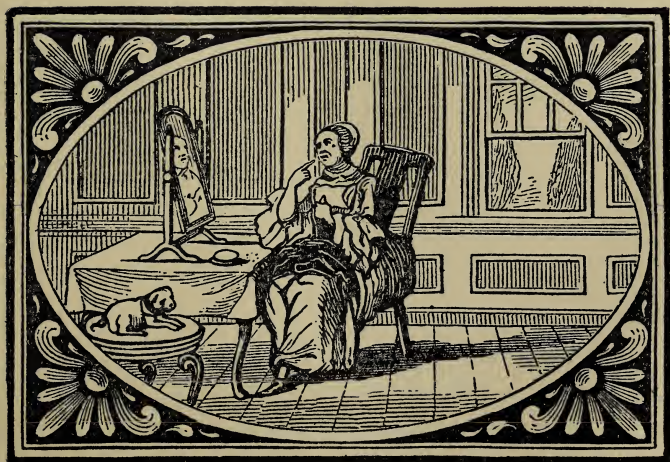
His chill eyes compelled her; she was won in a moment. Gerald realised his conquest as he fol-

lowed her into the Blue Parlour, but his taste was too perfect to permit of strutting; he went gravely and decorously behind her without so much as a glance in Dick's direction; his slight bow to Tam-Linn was a masterpiece of dignity and reserve.





*Book Two: JENNIFER*







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### *1. PHŒNIXES AND POMANDER BOXES*

**W**HETHER Gerald now fell under the disturbing influence of a true passion for Jennifer's fine-spun flesh, or whether he merely wished to possess her as he might have possessed a Chelsea figurine or a delicate piece of Meissen, is a question which, at this late date, may not improbably remain forever shrouded in mystery. He was, with all his faults, a person slightly superhuman; Jennifer, on the contrary, little more than half animate. Her vitality would have been amply sufficient for a sleepy water-sprite or a pink marble nymph waking at night among cypresses; before the prospect of a London wedding it swooned into a daze of terror, whence it was slowly revived by her father's caresses and Gerald's gift of a swans'-down hood. Lady Tam-Linn was not averse to avoiding the necessity of an Amazonian bevy of Lorn bridesmaids; she silenced her aunts by the discreet use of sentiment, and the reminder that poor little Nelly Cleverly and dear little Kitty Neville would now have a chance to shine unobscured save by Jennifer's own shrinking presence, veiled and drooping as it must inevitably ap-

pear. Among sniffs and one-sided smiles, a small and simple wedding in the parish church was confessed to be suitable; there the elfin creature had been christened, as her mother's breaking voice remembered; there she would in all probability be laid to rest, as Aunt Susanna's croak sarcastically reminded.

"Gerald will himself attain the Abbey," said Aunt Jane, who had in her youth been promised to a Post Captain in the Royal Navy, a tall fair man. This gentleman having unfortunately perished of an intermittent fever during a cruise of the West Indies, his betrothed ever afterwards wore a becoming sense of bereavement and a strand of yellow hair encased in a locket of Whitby jet. The colour of Gerald's hair approximated closely to that of the plaited circlet upon Aunt Jane's breast; it needed only the length of his legs to make her his fluttering champion upon all occasions.

Had the honeymoon extended no further than Bath, Jennifer could have danced in glass slippers indefinitely, without fear of splintering them upon anything rougher than the polished floor of the Pump Room. The languorous measures of a gavotte invited her indolence; her extreme beauty dazzled all eyes and tripped all tongues to stuttering. Even her half-humanity could not receive with complete indifference the love of the entire population of a fashionable watering-place. During the fortnight which the newly-wedded pair spent within its purlieus, a sort of midsummer madness descended upon the simmering town. Gerald had insisted that all of his lady's gowns should be either black or white in hue; if he found a stray garment



of sea-green or azure he incontinently consigned it to oblivion, careless of her ineffectual tears. A long apprenticeship to white book-muslin had bred in Jennifer a strong distaste for the blanched pearliness of satin or the frosty bloom of velvet without colour; she therefore dressed exclusively in black, to her husband's vast amusement and her mother's rumoured distress.

With what delight she now obscured her flaming curls in clouds of powder and her little limbs in stiffened furbelows of black brocade can only be conjectured; at the least she felt her slippers to be veritable glass and conceived of Gerald as a very passable prince. Her sable magnificence soon won for her the pretty title of the Mourning Bride; a vague aura of sadness haloed and surrounded her, and twenty romantic stories were born during three silver nights of the full harvest moon. A lover murdered upon the banks of the Euphrates and another killed in action upon the coast of Coromandel were among the tamest of these inventions; dawn frequently discovered various young blades of Bath shedding tears among the claret cups for the gallant death of Captain Corydon at the hands of Hyder Ali.

Jennifer accepted the tales of these visionary lovers with a certain pleased composure; such legends carried with them none of the inconveniences of mortality. Gerald entertained himself hugely at her expense, without in the least disturbing her grave self-esteem. She owned to a distinct preference for Colonel Clitander.

"My dear, you do well to cherish the memory of this brave officer. Modest and unassuming in

demeanour, his hardihood was well-nigh proverbial in India, and his riches so great that he was enabled to retire from the service after four years spent in Bengal. As you know to your lasting regret, he attempted to make the homeward journey overland attended only by servants, in whose integrity, alas, his noble nature trusted. These he unfortunately permitted to have sight of some valuable diamonds and other gems which he habitually carried in his writing-desk, and which were doubtless intended as gifts for his lovely girl. In consequence of his imprudence, the abandoned wretches were unkind enough to slay him and cast his lifeless body into that historic stream, from which it was never recovered, nor does any man know the fate of the murderers."

At this point Jennifer invariably saw the dark and terrible night studded with outrageous stars, and heard the sinister lapping of the river; the face of the hapless Colonel Clitander shone pale with sleep in the midst of gathering dangers, while the bodies of the servants crept nearer and nearer, like black and glistening snakes, to the couch of their victim.

"As for Captain Corydon," Gerald would continue with the utmost urbanity, placing the tips of his long fingers together and gazing dreamily into the distance with his large and somewhat glassy eyes, "his end was admittedly a sad one, yet I hardly think, my love, that you would have favoured his suit in the event of his return to Devonshire, for as you doubtless remember, that beautiful county was his home, making him your neighbour and your childhood's playmate. The only son of Squire

Corydon of Market-Arcady, Tom Corydon was blessed with a sunny disposition and the finest head of auburn hair which I ever beheld, naturally waving, egad, and of a thickness quite hyacinthine. He had an uncommonly good figure, too, a poetic mind, and accomplished manners. However, by a most unfortunate accident which befell him while still a mere lad attending Eton College, he had during some bout of fisticuffs or other boyish sport broken his nose, thus totally destroying the natural symmetry of his features and disfiguring himself for life. This circumstance rendered him less pleasing to the eye; it could not dim his genius or corrupt his virtues. It seems a thousand pities that owing to the unreasonable and hypercritical nature of woman-kind in general and of you, my darling, in particular, he should have lived the brief remainder of his days a lonely and disappointed man. My personal good fortune cannot stifle my sympathy for his distressing lot; I feel that the swords of Hyder Ali's assassins clove a broken heart as well as a broken nose."

With this he would smile blandly upon his bewildered wife, at the same time delicately tapping the elevated bridge of his own nose before curling his nostrils for the fastidious reception of a pinch of snuff. Jennifer conceived a violent antipathy for the brave Captain Corydon; she had a clear and rather horrible picture of a slim young man on a dappled grey mare riding down the lime avenue at Cleverly-Neville; as he approached the terrace she could see first his straight shoulders and the bronze abundance of that hyacinthine hair, then the flat and ape-like ugliness of his face smote upon her

shrinking vision, and she closed her eyes against the neat foil-lace of Gerald's left lapel. His words were always real to her; they carried a sibylline quality of revelation, and lived in her consciousness more vividly than the waistcoat buttons cold below her chin or the light touch disarranging her ringlets.

Gerald refused to remain at Bath for more than the fortnight of their original intention; he found the climate enervating and the company provincial, nor would he take the place seriously as a resort of the first fashion of the day. He was excruciatingly bored by Balloni, and thought the stakes at all games of hazard so low as to be negligible as a means to excitement. The capital band of French horns and clarinets then performing in the Pump Rooms he pronounced overestimated; Jennifer's dancing partners excited his rare and secretive mirth.

"Phœnixes and Pomander Boxes!" he whispered with cryptic sibilance in Jennifer's ear as he brought her a small glass of negus at supper time, gently removing from her unresisting hand the bumper of champagne which the aged Earl of Wessex had just placed there. "Phœnixes and Pomander Boxes!" His nearly soundless laughter, thin as a bat's cry, lost itself among the crystal lustres of the enormous chandeliers.

If the deceased lovers of the Mourning Bride were legendary, she herself was fabulous within a week, nor did it require either time or absence to endow her with all the attributes of a mythological paragon upon Olympus. After a swift post-chaise had indeed removed her from their view, leaving sorrow to add poignancy to her imagery presentment

graven in their hearts, her admirers were seldom able to command their voices in enunciating her name. She departed upon a fine sunny morning of mid-September; Gerald had ordered the horses for the fresh and virginal hour of six in order, as he said, to avoid the heat of the day and the impetuosity of crowds. Marching downstairs in all the majestic austerity of a long grey cloak and a black hat severely laced with silver, he had somewhat the air of an aristocratic highwayman. His scornfully detached gaze swept the Crescent without seeming to perceive the score of young gentlemen who surrounded the post-chaise, nor did the excessive absurdity of their appearance bring the slightest smile to his pallid and compressed lips. It may be that the long yellow hands, half-concealed by the fall of spider-web Mechlin, tightened significantly upon the Malacca cane; so Jennifer's timidity certainly fancied. With the highest degree of apprehension she realised that her attendant squires were dressed to a man in sombre habits, that their arms bore bands of crêpe, and that innumerable festoons of white flowers, of a most deathly and oppressive sweetness, dangled from their grasp. As the foremost stepped forward, proffering her what appeared to be an engrossed parchment of some solemn description, she turned the empty splendours of her eyes upon him; her small mouth formed itself into an expression of helpless entreaty. She was beyond words and felt that she should faint in another instant, the instant, probably, in which her young friend Mr. Shepherd put his ebony flute to his lips.

"Ignore this mummery!" cried Gerald in a voice like cracking glaciers; the grey cloak enveloped her



in a cold whirlwind of speed, and she fell back upon the purple cushions of the post-chaise, her drowning senses aware of a prodigious noise of wheels and whips and thundering hooves, through which the diminutive sound of the flute trickled in mournful farewell. The autumnal breeze soon revived her; she saw that a white tuberoses, flung by some brave spirit, had fallen into her lap. Her husband's immobility was so alarming that she dared not remove this object, lest it should attract his terrifying attention; it lay wilting in the hot parallels of sunlight that shifted over her knees; its lugubrious incense sickened her. When they stopped to change horses at "The Bear" in Devizes, she let it drop into the deep golden dust of the road; Gerald set his heel upon it with careful and exquisite precision.

London in 1772 was a scene of wild profligacy which Gerald viewed with a calm amusement having no little of the sinister in its smile. Possibly he enjoyed the sense of superiority which his own wire-drawn moderation produced; possibly he agreed with Mr. Hume, who writing from Edinburgh in that year, employed the following curious words, which must be taken with a salty grain of reminder that Mr. Hume was a Scotchman and an historian: "I am delighted to see the daily and hourly progress of madness and folly and wickedness in England. The consummation of these qualities are the true ingredients for making a fine narrative in history."

It is not improbable that Gerald saw these sentiments soon after they were penned; if so he certainly read them with sympathy and pleasure. Possessing a wit of the most cynical and subtle description, exactly suited to the fashion of the day, he

might well have rivalled Selwyn in this particular had not his indolence and reserve prevented. He drawled his graceless comment upon life quite irrespective of his company; he would not wait for a duke or a prime-minister to be present when he made a joke, and a passing butcher-boy or milliner's apprentice might extract what benefit they could from a muttered remark which should have convulsed Bellamy's. He teased his wife into white-faced apathy and her lady's-maid into hysterics, but he would not take the trouble to talk at Brookes' or the Chocolate House; he preferred to sit idly fingering his coffee-spoon and emitting an occasional and acid laugh at the expense of another's reputed brilliance. By every human law he should have been hated; instead he was triumphantly popular without the slightest effort on his own part.

Chances were the vogue; gaming now constituted Gerald's only vice, and as he was invariably lucky in the long run, he was enabled to be at once fashionable and provident. Mohawk and anti-Mohawk, Medmenham Abbey and the Houses of Parliament were equally dull and distasteful to his curious mind. Dick urged his entrance into politics; he replied with perfect candour that he would rather persuade Horace Walpole to sell him the little silver-gilt clock given by Henry the Eighth to Anne Boleyn than have the entire Cabinet in his pocket.

It had long been Gerald's declared design to take a London house for the ensuing year; Mrs. Forrest's magnificent mansion in James Street, with one front facing on the Bird Cage Walk in Saint James's Park seemed a suitable choice, and negotiations were already in progress when his wife's unaccount-



able horror of the town forced him to make other plans; his kindness to her in such matters was always beyond reproach. He had, indeed, looked forward with considerable amusement to this opportunity of studying the follies and dissipations of London life; the circumstance, however, of Jennifer's falling into a violent fit of hysterics in a Hackney coach on the way home from Ranelagh decided him in the intention of removing to Paris at once.

Jennifer's own idea of a small house in Devon was of course out of the question; he could only assure her that the gloomy and marmoreal atmosphere which so oppressed her spirit would be entirely lacking in the French capital; the sprightly elegance of that country must infallibly prove a more potent tonic than all the thatched roofs and clambering roses which her romantic fancy had been busily painting in the style of the best contemporary water-colours. She lay upon the looped and tasselled four-poster in Dick's suite of guest-rooms; below her Saint Albans Street was spread with straw in compliment to the accouchement of a next-door neighbour, but the mat of brittle gold-brown strands, muffling the clatter of iron and the click of leathern shoes, served only to increase her distress. From its beaten thickness there rose a smell of farmyards and fields which mingled with the scent of tobacco and patchouli to form a perfume grotesque and tragic to her imagination. The Honiton handkerchiefs of her trousseau were wetted with tears and lavender-water in equal proportions; Gerald grew politely weary of her delicate features drowned and her large eyes darkened in woe. Consultation with several eminent medical men re-

sulted only in the pronouncement that Lady Jennifer Poynyard was suffering from severe nostalgia; chivalry demanded that her husband sacrifice his personal inclination in the interest of her health, and in gently refusing to spend the Christmas season at Cleverly-Neville he contrived to make the delights of the French court so invigorating a prospect that Jennifer at once demanded her mirror, her maid, and her Spanish lace scarf.

That evening, seated with his bride in one of the most retired upper boxes of Covent Garden Theatre, Gerald laughed so heartily at the tragedy then occupying the boards that Jennifer herself was moved to mirth; his comments upon the audience were charmingly satirical, and only the knowledge that no one in the house could observe her new frock cast the slightest cloud over her quiet enjoyment. She was attired in a dress of white satin, embroidered in rose-buds, convolvulus, and vine-leaves shaded after nature; her hair was dressed in the latest fashion sponsored by the young niece of the Duc de Nivernois, the French Ambassador, and Gerald had permitted her to dust the faintest imaginable bloom of rouge upon the porcelain pallor of her cheek, so that it seemed merely to reflect the pink petals of her bodice. On leaving the theatre she attracted such favourable attention that Gerald was considerably annoyed and she experienced the strange sensation of swimming to her coach through a sea of languishing masculine glances, bright blue and amber and inky black. She felt rather frightened, and shrank so swooningly within the protecting curve of her husband's arm that he was able to think of her with pity no less than pride; this

put him into a high good humour, and, after supping upon hot jellies, he kissed her affectionately and retired to rest.

Jennifer lay awake for many hours; her thoughts, as ever, were vague and evasive, concerning themselves chiefly with Parisian vistas diminishing into dreams of the Parthemont Convent where she had spent her fifteenth year, to the vast improvement of her French and the temporary disablement of most of her reasoning faculties. She had for a time desired passionately to join the Roman Catholic Church, but the amused opposition of both parents soon put an end to what appeared to them the merest febrile and fantastic strivings after novelty. It had been the frequently expressed wish of her early adolescence that she should take the veil; had she proposed entering the harem of the Sultan of Turkey or going as a missionary into the interior of Mongolia the plan could not have seemed more ridiculous to her mother's decorously ordered mind. "Pray do not mention this absurd idea to your father; he would be seriously displeased, my love," said Clarinda, suppressing her smiles under a tender gravity. Jennifer went immediately to the library and informed Tam-Linn of her intention; the storm of chuckles with which he met her was far more discouraging than anger. The result of these conversations was that Jennifer did not return to the convent, and was therefore always somewhat doubtful about the conjugation of certain irregular verbs in her use of the French tongue, though she retained an admirable knowledge of the Letters of Fénelon, the *Telemachus* of the same author, and the *Athalie* of Racine.

“Dear Gerald assures me that Paris will restore my spirits,” she thought, as she lay watching the bluish flame of her night-light diffused in a dim radiance beside her bed, spreading thinly, like milk in a muddy pool, through a darkness rendered more brown than black by filtrations of fog from without; beyond the window-panes an evil yellow gloom mirrored and magnified the ring of brightness. “He is extraordinarily kind to me; I ought not to allow myself to fall into these moods of melancholy. I think the climate of London must be ill-suited to my constitution; I remember that the east wind in Paris is said to be decidedly bracing; I must ask Gerald about a new fur pelisse to-morrow, without fail. ‘So shines a good deed in a naughty world.’—Shakespeare. The French consider him barbarous. It is a pity that Mr. Gray should have died after all, in spite of the Duke’s kindness. I had so wished to meet him; I prefer his ‘Country Churchyard’ to Mr. Goldsmith’s ‘Deserted Village’; I believe Mr. Goldsmith to be a little lacking in elegance. ‘Out, out, brief candle.’ Shakespeare again. Papa admires Shakespeare. How dreadful it would be if the light were actually to be extinguished; this room is very draughty. ‘’Tis but a night, a long and moonless night. . . .’ Blair’s Grave . . . my Aunt Susanna’s favourite poem. ‘To paint the gloomy horror of the tomb. . . .’ I wish I did not remember it so well; my aunt continually read it aloud to me when I was a child. Paris . . . Paris . . . how delightful to see it once more! I trust the good sisters have none of them died; impossible to conceive of Paris without them. *La Rêve* . . . Racine . . . Corneille. ‘Ne verse

point de pleurs sur cette sepulture passant: ce lit funèbre est un lit précieux.' Death; poets are forever writing about death. These purple curtains always turn black at night; they are too sombre a shade. 'My love is dead, gone to his death-bed. . . .' Ah, that unfortunate youth Chatterton . . . dead by his own hand! Dead . . . dead . . . I am becoming excessively morbid; let me resolutely think of something else . . . the beauties of nature . . . Devon. . . . Ah, no, not that! Pictures; I have seen many beautiful pictures in London. . . . I wish Sir Joshua had given the Academy's gold medal to young Mr. Flaxman. . . . Gerald says he is a most deserving person. I am to have my miniature taken in Paris . . . à Paris . . . Paradis . . ."

Jennifer fell asleep at that moment when the shadows dropped a monstrous lid over the night-light's little azure eye; swiftly the room dissolved into pure darkness.

Preparations for their departure were soon under way; Gerald, while himself preserving a princely calm, looked indulgently upon Jennifer's fits of childish mirth. The miasma of her homesickness was quickly dissipated in a high wind of excitement; no bonnet nor mantle was laid in her boxes but found a more dazzling counterpart in her imagination; Paris was to materialise these visions in actual straw and silken weaves. Under her husband's encouragement a good half of her wedding garments were given away to her prettier cousins; he would not permit the really plain girls to receive anything but the products of the Cleverly-Neville sempstress. But the most flaxen-and-cream

of the Devonshire lot was rendered ecstatically happy by the gift of an apple-green gauze, while a certain black-haired Eleanor Lorn looked statuesque for three Edinburgh seasons in a sapphire velvet of the richest quality.

Jennifer was beginning to understand that her earlier incarnation as a beauty of Bath was to be no more than a farthing dip in comparison with the approaching dawn of her glory; she was to rise from the foam of the English Channel like a copy of Venus Anadyomene in gold and ivory, presently to be clothed in suitable raiment by the inspired mantua-makers of Paris.





## 2. THE ITALIAN VINAIGRETTE



ONE disagreeable incident marred this happy period in the life of the newly-wedded pair; the Directors of the East India Company were sufficiently ill-advised as to ask Gerald to join their Board. Probably Sir George Colebrooke was largely responsible for this step; its result was a two-days' rage on the part of Gerald, natural enough under the circumstances to one of his haughty and uncompromising habit of mind. He shut himself up in his apartments and refused to speak to any member of the household for forty-eight hours; Mohammed had strict injunctions to set his meals, neatly arranged on a tray, outside the door of his study at stated intervals and with the least possible noise. Dick was genuinely distressed; his kind heart could not share in his wife's more critical estimate of Gerald's conduct.

"My dear," he said hesitatingly, "is it not after all the Directors who are at fault? Our cousin is slow to wrath, but this extraordinary suggestion could not fail to disturb even an equanimity so admirable as his. Think of what this would mean; a complete cessation of his more important Indian activities; an enforced residence in London; association with dotards. The thing is unthinkable. The boy is brilliant and is, very wisely, aware of the

fact; this preposterous plan would fetter him, deprive him of his freedom of action; in a word, clip his wings. I hope my estimate of human nature is not too cynical if I suspect an undercurrent of jealousy in the minds of these gentlemen; they are well informed as to Gerald's status in Bengal; it is, indeed, an enviable one. . . . The rest is only too clear. I have the greatest sympathy with his agitation of soul; the difficulty of resenting this sort of sly and subtle insult sticks in the throat of a proud man. I honour him for his keen sense of personal dignity; I took pains to give him the liver-wing of the goose and to see that his claret was at the proper temperature to-night."

"Cook grumbles at trays, and the maids are all afraid of that Ethiopian when he comes into the kitchen," his wife replied with considerable asperity. "In my opinion Gerald is extremely selfish; Cook would be very hard to replace, and you know how dependent I am upon Miles for my comfort. However, I say nothing; remonstrances are quite useless where your distinguished relative is concerned. Thank heaven he is no kin of mine; my heart bleeds for his poor young wife." She was silent, to Dick's relief; her averted eyes spoke for her.

"The Moslem population of India has little admixture of Ethiopian blood," he said with great mildness. His wife walked out of the room; he heard her speaking gently and placatingly to Miles in the corridor.

"I assure you, my excellent creature, that there is not the slightest danger of rape; pray set the kitchen-maid's mind at rest upon this point," she whispered. He picked up a still-folded copy of

that new and fashionable journal, the *Morning Post*, from his wife's work-table, and laying it down almost reverently outside Gerald's door, tip-toed softly away.

Jennifer was awed into silence; she felt, nevertheless, that the dispensation of Providence which temporarily deprived her of her husband's society was merciful rather than otherwise. His face, as he strode away from her simple-minded inquiries, had not been reassuring.

"This is the work of Laurence Sullivan; you may depend upon it that Sullivan has had a hand in this," he informed her accusingly. "He knows I am of Clive's party, and that I understand the true state of Indian Stock. Verney will drop a couple of hundred thousand in this affair; I told him so only last week. Observe that this offer is very nearly coincident with our conversation. I wish my quilted dressing-gown at once."

Jennifer leaped to her feet in a shower of coloured spools from her sewing-case; she brought him the dressing-gown herself, her small shaking hands thrusting it through a door so grudgingly opened that it afforded but a fleeting glimpse of a countenance composed to the inhuman colour and impassivity of stone.

On the second night she woke startled; her eyes flew open at the click of a key in the lock, her glance strove wildly to penetrate the uniform obscurity of the room. She was aware of the immeasurably slow creaking turn of the door-knob, wherein oil and rust alternatively soothed and retarded the scrape of metal upon metal. A thin slit of flame-colour spread to a band dappled and pied with shades;

then against a background of fire-light, paling as it broadened behind him, the silhouette of her husband stood revealed. His crest of sandy hair and the extreme edges of his crimson dressing-gown were tinged with a reddish glimmer; for the rest he was a figure carved from darkness. As he stepped noiselessly towards the bed he might have been cloaked and masked in black velvet; even his eye-balls held no lustre. The acidulated softness of his voice steadied her nerves by pulling them tighter; it slid along them like a slender bow drawn athwart the strings of a violin. He towered above her, prodigiously tall, elongated into the semblance of his own shadow.

"Come," he said, "I wish to talk with you." She was unable to answer; without another word he swooped downwards, lifting her from the pillows as if she had been a doll. Like a doll she dangled in his arms; under the fine lawn of her nightgown her flesh was cold as wax. He dragged the great purple counterpane from the bed and enveloped her in its heavy and voluminous folds; she was swathed in thick brocade like a little mummy in imperial cerements. He threw her back over his bony shoulder with a movement so adroit that it succeeded in being gentle; her head drooped low, the confusion of her hair swung against his shoulder-blades like tawny clusters of grapes; she appeared lifeless. Inwardly she was calm; she felt exhausted by the shock of her surprise, but nevertheless a vague sense of satisfaction possessed her mind; she was conscious that Gerald was paying her a compliment. If his flattery was amazing it was none the less unmistakable; he was about to

consult with his loving wife the matters of importance which had engaged his solitary reflections for two days.

In the study a large fire had fallen to a heap of rose-red embers, stirred here and there by airy wings of flame. Two extravagantly rococo armchairs faced the fender; their golden scrollwork and Tyrian upholstery turned them into thrones; the tiger-skin rug beneath them lent a touch of barbaric splendour to the scene. Jennifer knew in a flash that Gerald had shot the tiger in the most perilous wilds of Bengal; the stock of his gun had rested upon the spot where her heart now beat. She realised with respect that neither her own proximity or that of the tiger could ever accelerate the measured pulses of her husband's blood; he was above fear, and though love might move him to tenderness it could never submerge him in folly. A small painted table held the remains of a partridge and a cut glass decanter; the bones of the former were picked to a pale filagree ghost; the latter's sole reminder of the generous wine which it had undoubtedly contained was a faintly roseate tinting of its pattern. The floor around one of the chairs was littered with portentous folios and documents; a great sheet of vellum decorated with a scarlet seal lay in the midst of a heap of letters. Gerald deposited her in the other chair; so seated, she was at his right hand; at his left a solitary candle burned above the supper tray's silver dishes.

She sat half reclining in the vastness of the chair, a delicate and fantastic creature overwhelmed by uncongenial grandeur; her little face seemed suspended upon its sumptuous background, as if she



were the youngest and most beautiful of Bluebeard's wives, decapitated in her sleep, and still smiling.

Gerald drew a book from the table; she noticed that it was bound in morocco, and that its pages were propped open with a richly chased nut-cracker.

"My child," he began, in a serious but affectionate tone, "you have probably felt the loneliness of the last few days weigh heavily upon the natural cheerfulness of your disposition; you are in need of a little mental relaxation. I do not propose to weary you with the recital of my own affairs, which would certainly fatigue and probably perplex your understanding. Instead, I intend reading aloud to you extracts from a delightful work which my Paris bookseller has but just sent me; he has orders to transmit to me immediately upon their publication all the best novels, plays and books of travel that are produced in France, first having them suitably bound in order that I may later include them in my library. This volume is by Bernardin de Saint Pierre; its title is '*Voyage à l'Ile de France*.' You may possibly know this island better under its other name of Mauritius; the author's long residence there has rendered him peculiarly fitted to write upon this subject; his style is charming. I desired to share my pleasure in it with you, my dearest girl. Forgive my apparent neglect; let us be happy together. In view of our imminent journey to the East this work will be of especial interest to you; the events of the past few days have warned me that I must not prolong our stay in Paris beyond six weeks at the latest. You are looking very lovely to-night; allow me to kiss your hand."



He stooped and brushed her small and chilly fingers with his lips, which did not lose the slightest part of their habitual compression in the act of gallantry. His eyes, however, pale, prominent, and now very lustrous in the firelight, devoured her with a curious intensity of gaze which seemed, mild and deliberate as a cat's tongue, to lick up the cream of her beauty and swallow it with quiet satisfaction.

He sat, a supremely elegant figure, lounging in the enormous chair, his slim ankles crossed and thrust towards the heat of the embers, his narrow hands supporting the heavy book in mid-air without apparent effort. His low and somewhat sibilant voice caressed the French words with soft precision; his large white eyelids concealed the curious look, which gradually fading from his wife's mind, left it vacant of everything except the images of dreams. Under successive waves of sleep she grew unconscious of the dulness of the book, the gentleness of Gerald's voice, and the comfortable warmth of the fire, all these causes combining none the less to smother her beneath a drowsiness so deep and pleasant that she believed herself to be lying on the sunny side of a haycock in the south meadow at Cleverly-Neville.

She woke to a room thinly silver-gilt with winter dawn; Gerald was still reading, in a low, perfectly modulated voice.

Gerald breakfasted on China tea and a couple of well-peppered mutton chops; facing him Jennifer drooped somewhat pallidly over the *Critical Review*. Afterwards he permitted her to assist him in dealing with his varied correspondence, grown more

voluminous than ever since the news of his impending departure had spread through London. Several gentlemen of reputed importance were the recipients of short and savage notes which, composed by him in a mood of tranquil enjoyment, were transcribed in the delicate and spidery scroll-work of his wife's handwriting; the barbed and poisoned arrows of his wit struck home all the more shrewdly from behind the cover of the amber-scented sheets of paper which she turned so meticulously into the likenesses of little cocked hats.

Gerald's good humour continued throughout the day; that afternoon at dinner his merry laughter at the expense of most of their acquaintances proved so infectious that Lady Dicker told the story of her sister Selina's affair with the Cornish curate, and Dick, on joining the ladies in the drawing-room, obliged them very much by singing that popular song, "Cease, Rude Boreas . . ." He then proposed an adjournment to Covent Garden Theatre, where a new ballet had just been put on.

"A charming idea, Dick," said Gerald calmly, "but impractical under the circumstances; the necessity of our being up betimes would render such a course extremely fatiguing to Jennifer." On Dick's protesting his ignorance of any such necessity, Gerald informed the others that he and his wife were leaving for Dover the next day, he having previously written to hire a vessel to convey them across the Channel. Reasoning was without avail; remonstrances were so much wasted breath; his decision was irrevocable.

Jennifer discovered to her amazement, on going upstairs to warn her maid Sallie of their immediate

journey, that Gerald had already caused that young woman to pack her mistress's boxes to the last ribbon, and had himself escorted Mohammed into the room to strap and cord them. One portmanteau alone gaped half-empty upon the carpet, waiting to swallow up her little slippers and the flimsy elegancies of her peignoir and her fringed shawl. On the dressing-table a sparse selection of perfume bottles and ivory-backed brushes remained to tell of her husband's attention to every detail of their arrangements. Sallie, her face blubbered with tears, moved distractedly about the dismantled room; when Jennifer entered the girl jumped as if a pistol had been discharged at her ear.

It had been tacitly arranged that Tam-Linn and Clarinda were to come up to town before their daughter left for France; Jennifer knew beyond a doubt how deeply her father and mother would resent her apparent indifference to the claims of filial affection. The reflection troubled her, but she felt too dazed and weary to think with any degree of continuity of the unfortunate results of this strangely hurried farewell to England. That it was indeed farewell she realised quite clearly; Gerald often spoke of embarking for India from some Spanish port; even if he finally decided to take ship at Gravesend their stay in London would probably be a matter of a few hours at the most. Her brain whirled like a shuttle-cock thrown violently across enormous distances; she felt positively light-headed in the endeavour to concentrate her thoughts. Sitting down at the writing-desk, she picked up a long green quill pen; she observed that it had recently been mended with the most consum-

mate skill, and recognised the work of her husband's penknife.

She drew a sheet of paper towards her; she had every intention of writing to her parents in a manner which would leave no room for dubious question as to her sorrow in parting from them. Then the vast black curtain of the future seemed to sway before her swimming eyes; it was all at once a portent, a thunder-cloud, a pillar of thick smoke; it grew like a tree, its broad trunk blotting out imagination, its branches obscuring time and space. She laid her forehead against the cool smooth satin-wood of the table, which danced a little upon its spindle legs in rhythmic accompaniment to her sobbing. She regained her composure almost at once; a desperate languor descended heavily upon her, and she slept with her brow bowed down upon the desk, the green quill pen still clutched between her fingers.

She slept, and sleeping saw the events of the day pass before her vision, little altered from their original course, but grown more vivid and at the same time more menacing. One incident in particular, trivial as it had seemed at the time, was revived into a mysterious and elusive significance. She was walking home from a shopping tour; Lady Dicker walked beside her, with short steps and inconsequent chatter of stay-laces. The lady's presence had jarred but slightly on Jennifer's waking self; now the dream made her a gadfly, a miniature fury not to be shaken off even by winged heels and streaming banners of hair. They went faster and faster; the grey streets flew by in a lateral frieze of faces; behind were voices and clattering shoes,

before, some unknown peril quaked or yawned in quagmires and precipices. Then at a noisy corner, where horses, suddenly pulled up, snorted with steaming red nostrils and the muddy brooms of crossing-sweepers drew crescents in the mire, Jennifer beheld a tall figure approaching, threading its way adroitly and delicately through the dingy rout of pedestrians.

The figure resolved itself into a youth of pleasing appearance, of slight build and military carriage; his head was bowed as if in dejection or profound thought. He was attired in full regimentals; certain modifications of his dress made it clear that he was in the deepest mourning. The result was at once affecting and elegant; the scarlet coat was lined with black silk, and worn with black waistcoat, breeches, and stockings. A black sword, adorned with a sword love-knot of the same sable hue, completed the costume; the countenance of the young gentleman matched it to a nicety in combining extreme good looks with an expression of heart-rending melancholy. He could not long have passed his twentieth year; Jennifer was grieved to observe the evident marks of sorrow upon the features of one so pre-eminently fitted for a life of happy adventure. He was pale; his dark hair curled above a candid brow too early traced with lines of suffering. Between his large eyes and his pointed chin the contours of his face still held a childish purity of outline; the little hollows under his cheek-bones and the firmness of his small lips were touchingly incongruous. His air of fashion merely succeeded in making him more pathetic.

He carried his hat in his hand; during their brief



meeting in the morning's reality he had only gazed at her sadly and passed on in silence. In the dream his gaze was the same; his brown eyes were full of a hurt and startled recognition; he seemed to wait for some sign on her part, the lack of which bewildered him. Then he stopped and spoke; his voice was strange, it seemed to traverse wild spaces before it reached her ears, and yet it fell like comfort on her heart.

"Madam," he said, with a grave little bow, "do you wish me to save you? You have but to command me; I am yours." Her own voice also sounded strange; it might have travelled from the moon before it answered him.

"Save me, sir? From what do I require to be saved?"

He shook his head with a sort of vague and absent-minded despair; his eyes searched hers hopelessly; he was gone. The crowd surged around her, ugly and evil-smelling; a grotesque painted face spat an unknown word in the direction of her questioning glance; another, between a fuzz of silvery hair and a clerical collar, leered ambiguously. She woke screaming; long after she had dragged herself across the room to sink shuddering into the softness of the bed she continued to feel a sharp and peculiar anguish of sorrow and fear. . . . At last she fell into a deep slumber in which no memory remained of the day's events or the night's dreams; the image of the pale-faced youth was expunged from her mind. She never thought of him again.

The sailing vessel which Gerald had engaged for their conveyance across the Channel was new and commodious; every preparation had been made for



their comfort, and Jennifer was delighted with the little cabin with its look of a nautical doll's-house; only an unfortunate change in the weather prevented her from appreciating the interest and novelty of the voyage. A severe storm rose during the night; the danger was real and imminent, but Jennifer was completely indifferent to the outcome of the situation. She wondered feebly how Sallie could evince such a liveliness of terror when Gerald, drenched to the skin but calm and suavely stoical, came into the cabin in search of a heavier cloak and a larger flask of Cognac.

"A stiffish breeze, my love," he told her reassuringly; his amiable composure was unshaken when she peevishly declined the sip of brandy which he offered her with such courteous solicitude. When she turned her face to the white-panelled wall and then turned it back again with a groan because the wall smelled so strongly of fresh paint and turpentine, he smoothed her forehead with a cold salty hand; when she pushed his hand away he only smiled indulgently and ordered Sallie to find her mistress's vinaigrette at once. The girl obeyed with blanched cheeks and tottering footsteps; she was an admirable sailor and felt not the slightest inconvenience from the fury of the waves, having passed most of her early childhood in her father's fishing-boat off the coast of Devon; the certainty of drowning in this foreign sea was less disturbing to her nerves than Gerald's touch upon her shoulder and his simple incisive word in her ear.

The vinaigrette, a delicate trifle of Italian workmanship, immediately slid from Jennifer's listless fingers and rolled under the bunk, where it lay until

the Captain found it the next day; he presented it to his wife on their silver wedding anniversary, which happened to fall on Wednesday of the following week. She liked it none the less for being golden as a guinea; the consensus of opinion among her friends inclined to silver-gilt as its probable material, which, if it rendered it not quite so valuable, made it infinitely more appropriate to the occasion.

Gerald remained upon deck during the entire night; the storm merely served to exhilarate his spirits and occupy his mind. When he thought of the Dickers reduced to backgammon instead of four-handed whist he laughed above the booming of the gale; his blood was up, and as he sprang out of the lighted cabin into the ink-black pandemonium of the elements he thought of a warm fireside as the most detestable prison that a degenerate race had ever constructed.


"Sodden and torpid . . . sodden and torpid!" he shouted defiantly into the teeth of the wind. It was one of his rare moments of enthusiasm; the knowledge that he was the only human being on board who remained totally devoid of fear sent a fire through his veins which no distillation of grapes grown under the hottest suns of the Midi had ever kindled there. The little crew was divided between admiration and loathing; the men felt that as self-respecting seamen they should not permit any one but the Captain to swear at them so savagely, yet when they saw this tall devil leap well-nigh halfway up the mast in a single movement of incredible agility, when they perceived the palms of his white hands flayed raw and bloody by the ropes upon which he hauled with such strength and skill, they

allowed the admiration to triumph; not one of them but had a swig from his flask before the night was out.

When the milk-white dawn lay reflected in the darkness of Calais sands, Gerald sluiced a bucket of cold, green sea-water over his scarred fingers; his face was crusted with dried spray, and he scrubbed it unmercifully with a bit of oily oakum, at the same time reflecting pleasantly that Paris afforded a larger selection of soaps, medicated lotions and perfumed unguents than any other spot on earth. He reached deep into his pockets only to discover that his roll of bank-notes was soaking wet; the yellow sovereigns which he distributed among the crew turned their awed regard into a more jovial expression of their sentiments concerning him, and Jennifer was wakened to a splitting headache and a blaze of early sunshine by the loud three-times-three which re-echoed from the deck above her cabin.



### 3. EXCESSES IN VENEER

 HE *voiture* which he had bespoken in advance was already waiting them at the Lion d'Argent, but Gerald would not hear of Jennifer's continuing the journey until she had rested upon one of the best feather-beds in that celebrated hostelry, while he himself hovered over her with every possible attention to her comfort, including lavender-water, sal-volatile, and strong tea brewed by Sallie in the kitchen of the inn, to the great anger of the cook and Mme. Dessein herself, who were engaged in preparing a parsley omelette and a filet of sole for *Milord*. With this and some passable coffee he made a very fair breakfast; later he sought to rouse Jennifer's spirits by an amusing account of his first visit to Dessein's in the year 1765, when as a mere lad he had enjoyed the good fortune of dining at the same table with Sterne, then engaged in collecting material for his agreeable work, later published under the title of "A Sentimental Journey."

"In those days I was more easily entertained," he said smiling. "I should not have relished Mr. Sterne at breakfast this morning."

Gerald had arranged to go by post from Calais to Paris, with four horses, two postillions, and his own servant on horseback. Mohammed had protested in vain; his swarthy face looked darker and

more dazed than ever above the ordinary livery of an English lackey, which Gerald considered more appropriate for the journey than the man's usual white robes and turban. Sallie was to share the coachman's seat, being quite content to do so after she had been informed by her young mistress of the exorbitant sum which this privilege was to cost them. Altogether, taking the whole procedure as easily and comfortably as possible, they could hardly hope to get to Paris under twenty pounds, ten or twelve of which would go for the expenses of posting in the grand style; Gerald was sure to insist upon patronising the best inns, nor would he condescend to concern himself about the double charges for the so-called royal posts.

His French acquaintances had always spoken of him as *un homme prodigue*, which appellation he received as a compliment in spite of the fact that he knew it was intended as a somewhat severe criticism. But now his money-belt was so corpulent that he was forced to lock it in his portmanteau lest it interfere with the refined slimness of his figure, and he had draughts upon Messieurs Panchaud and Foley, the well-known bankers of the rue Saint Sauveur for such truly magnificent sums that Jennifer need not have felt any uneasiness, as she undoubtedly did when they were charged forty sous apiece for a very poor dinner at the inn at Abbéville.

Jennifer's fatigue and his own desire to view the curious structures of this quaint old town strengthened Gerald in his determination to spend the night in Abbéville instead of pushing on to Amiens, which their excellent horses could quite



well have accomplished. The churches were somewhat disappointing; the best inn which the place afforded was both small and dirty; the pleasant crimson-curtained parlour of its Devonshire equivalent was entirely lacking. While dinner was preparing, Jennifer lay miserably on the high uneven bed; the lavender-scented sheets and silken coverlid with which Sallie had sought to mitigate the dinginess of this equivocal couch giving little peace to her mind however much they might soothe the exhaustion of her body. When Gerald proposed a stroll through the streets "in order to prevent our chicken from being under-done and to allow them sufficient time to wash the salad properly," she accepted the suggestion with docility and sweetness. Below in the courtyard the inn-servants were quarrelling violently among themselves; with a shudder of relief she took Gerald's proffered arm and turned into the principal thoroughfare of the town.

The clear pale saffron of the sky hung tenderly above the ancient houses; the yellow stone-crop on the roofs, the coppery rust streaking the iron-barred doors, were painted in colours of flame. Jennifer, in her swans'-down hood and black-velvet pelisse, picked her way cautiously over the huge cobblestones; Gerald conducted her down a roughly paved street, immensely broad, and at this hour almost totally deserted. Behind the reticence of the house-fronts, bolted and grim as fortresses, secret as graves, she imagined horrors of imprisonment long drawn out and of murder quickly consummated; once a stifled scream turned her blood cold as winter rain.

Finally their ramble led them to the brink of a small stream or canal; its margins were trimmed



with emerald water-weed; in the midst of the dun and purple tints of the surrounding landscape it wore an air of country gaiety and grace. It was crossed by a little rustic bridge; a flock of geese made lively its farther side, while numerous ducks in variegated plumage swam upon its looking-glass surface. The whole scene was happy and pastoral, in perfect harmony with the hushed tranquillity of the evening sky. Some women in grotesque foreign caps and aprons came to lean upon the railing of the bridge and gossip volubly; if they had been clothed aright in pretty prints and calicoes, if their voices had been softer and their countenances more prepossessing, and above all if they had not been speaking French, poor Jennifer might almost have imagined herself to be safe in Cleverly-Neville. Even as it was, she returned to the inn considerably refreshed in mind and body, to dine on a sliver of chicken breast and a thimbleful of white wine; the salad unfortunately tasted of garlic.

Afterwards she took out her new writing desk, and penned an affectionate letter to her parents, containing a full account of their stormy passage across the Channel, the scenery of that portion of France which lies directly east of Calais, and concluding with a poetic account of sunset gilding the spires of Abbéville, during the course of which, out of respect to her father's and mother's several tastes in literature, she quoted once from the *Tempest* and three times from the *Deserted Village*. Her mother forwarded this epistle to Horace Walpole, who seems never to have acknowledged its receipt; there is not the slightest reason to suppose that he read it.

The following night the travellers spent at

Amiens; Gerald found it difficult to accord an unreserved admiration to the celebrated Cathedral, which he nevertheless allowed to be impressive and in a measure sublime. Since Gothic was the fashion he magnanimously felt that it should be given every opportunity of pleasing a man of taste; when it failed to do so, however, he had no hesitation in blaming the Cathedral rather than himself. "It has a rude magnificence, a romantic charm . . . but there is a lack of restraint . . . almost one is tempted to say, a touch of vulgarity. The fad will pass . . . we should not concern ourselves too deeply with these gigantic monuments to superstition. Only the classic can endure the tooth of time; I shall take you to see the *Maison Carrée* at Nîmes, a very perfect example of Roman architecture of the best period; it dates from the year one. It has infinite lightness and grace; I much prefer it to the amphitheatre in the same town or the still finer one at Arles."

On the third day the easy stages of their journey brought them to the famous town of Chantilly; Gerald found himself both hungry and thirsty, so though it was no more than mid-day, and they could have pushed on to Paris that same night, he decided that it was his bounden duty to exhibit to Jennifer the palace, long the seat of the princes of Condé, and the extensive forest so vastly improved by M. le Notre during the previous century; its birds, fountains, cascades, canals and other more or less natural beauties filled her with delight after the dusty road, and, notwithstanding the fact that it was already November, its sylvan glades and picturesque water-courses were still dressed in tints of

gold and blue under the silver sun of noon. At dinner he further regaled her with the story of the suicide of Vatel, cook to the great Condé, subsequent upon the non-arrival of a fine salmon from Paris which should have preceded by several hours the advent of Louis the Fourteenth as the guest of his renowned master.

"Over-conscientiousness, my dear, has wrecked many a promising career; I honour scruples, but they, like everything else under heaven, have their place and should be kept there; in this case they should have remained in the kitchen." He leaned back in his chair, which was fairly comfortable, and sipped his wine, which if it left something to be desired, was at least the best to be procured in Chantilly. Jennifer regarded him with servile wonder and admiration; she was no more awed by his intimate knowledge of such amusing historical incidents than by his ability to carve a roast duck or eat a French artichoke with neatness and grace.

"How very distressing," she murmured sadly, struggling with the spiny leaves upon her own plate. Gerald possessed himself of it with quiet dexterity; in an instant he had bisected the whole recalcitrant vegetable, transferring its delicate inner portions to a clean saucer and adding thereto a large allowance of Holland Sauce and the half of a carefully buttered roll. Later, while he peeled and quartered a small apple for her dessert, he related several stories of the gorgeous past, when the great Condé had enjoyed the society of Racine and Molière amid these sympathetic surroundings.

They left Chantilly early the next morning; a

white mist enveloped the earth; the sunrise at its heart turned it into a fire-opal. They moved remote and lost through the colourless silence, which seemed to make their progress slow and solemnly portentous. Gerald discoursed lightly of the subjects which had occupied his mind during the preceding night; he was urbanity itself beside the languor of Jennifer, the impatience of Sallie, and the dignified bitterness of Mohammed. He alone spoke before eleven o'clock; the servants may have been silent out of respect, but no such excuse can be offered for his wife's conduct. She undoubtedly slept during a large part of the journey, owing to the circumstance of her nights being disturbed by dolorous cogitations and waking dreams. The suicide of Vatel had engaged her fancy during the previous evening after she had retired to the questionable peace of her chamber; the ministrations of Sallie, though well-intentioned, were not particularly effective in calming her agitated nerves.

"Cut his throat with the bread-knife, I'll be bound, ma'am," was that young person's contribution to a subject unwisely opened by Jennifer in the hope of receiving comfortable assurances that at the worst the poor wretch had experienced no difficulty in obtaining an opiate poison from the stores of the Prince's apothecary. "If it had been a murder, now, he might have used the meat chopper, but a suicide's different; depend it, ma'am, that it was either the bread-knife or one of those little sharp affairs as cooks set such store by for vegetables."

During the day Jennifer revived considerably; she was able to take an intelligent interest in the great Abbey of Saint-Denis, though the close prox-

imity of the illustrious dead now occupying such superb tombs within the sacred precincts afflicted her weak spirit with a noticeable melancholy towards the approach of evening.

"They sleep well," said Gerald kindly; she had no idea that the words were not original, and agreed hopefully, at the same time making a slight mental reservation to the effect that the sculpture looked monstrously heavy to form a coverlid for the daintily articulated skeleton of a queen.

With her mind more and more preoccupied with fantastic imaginings, she began to plan a dream-progress through the golden castles and green forests of the past; a Una all snow and innocent fire, she would wander forever companioned by a chivalrous and courageous lion, her thin white hands warmed in his tawny mane, her shining head pillowed upon his broad bosom at night. It would be far more romantic than a chaise, and also more comfortable; when the way led over velvet mosses and soft violets, she could walk barefoot in the dew; when she encountered stones or thorns or shifting sands, she could mount upon the thick-furred saddle of her champion's back, and ride unscathed into the next valley of enamelled lawns. She saw this noble animal quite plainly in her mind's eye; he looked very much like Tam-Linn attired in the hide of the Scots sheep-dog which her father had given her on her seventh birthday; the strange creature inspired her with the utmost confidence. She could have wept for the grotesque consolation of its presence.

Roused from her reflections by their proximity to the great city, which soon made itself evident in a closer grouping of buildings and a denser crowd-



ing of vehicles of every description, from rude wooden carts harnessed with ropes and adorned with sheep-skins to richly painted chariots, Jennifer soared into a state of exhilaration very unusual in one of her pensive disposition. The Calvinistic principles which her father's family had sought to implant in her youthful understanding had not unnaturally produced a contrary effect, including a pronounced leaning towards the Jacobite cause and the Roman Catholic faith. She now begged that their excursions might shortly include a pilgrimage to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, where she might follow in fancy the slow pacing of exiled princes along its melancholy and autumnal alleys of deflowered lime-trees. She evinced no interest in Henry of Navarre, merely remarking, to her husband's vast delight, that she had always understood he was a dissenter.

Night fell; in front of them a smoky radiance hovered suffused and vague in the dusty atmosphere. "Paris at last," cried Gerald with suppressed emotion; Jennifer very nearly fainted from fatigue and excitement; Sallie laughed hysterically, the postillions swore at the sweating horses, Mohammed prayed audibly, his lips set and sombre within his curling beard. In another ten minutes' hurry they drove swaying and clattering up to the Porte Saint-Denis.

They lodged at the Hotel de l'Impératrice in the rue Jacob, where they had an elegant apartment on the first floor; the situation was good, and the furniture, in Jennifer's estimation, magnificent, but Gerald found fault with it from the beginning.



"I detest stamped velvet," he said with acerbity; "Beauvais tapestry is, of course, infinitely worse; the violently rococo forms in furniture have always repelled me. As for this fellow's claim, my dear, that the contents of our apartment was formerly the property of some grand seigneur, I am but too well acquainted with the type of person to whom the acquisition of such lamentable objects is as a second nature, effortless as breathing, inevitable as death. Such chairs and settees were obviously purchased by a man of middling family and questionable breeding, to whom the concurrent possession of great wealth and execrable taste gave power to mark down and make his own these spoils of barbarism. I imagine that the wretch lost his money in no such gentlemanlike way as the gaming-tables provide; he was the victim of various shady speculations and ill-bred enterprises, into which no man of true quality could ever have been drawn. His fate was richly deserved; my one regret is that after having fallen beneath the avenging hammer of the public auctioneer, these distressing excesses in veneer and debaucheries in gold-leaf should have found shelter under the same roof with people of acute judgment and refined sensibilities. I fear their effect upon your appetite, my beloved girl; your déjeuner this morning would not have supported the vitality of an invalid humming-bird. It is only the tonic influence of this excellent burgundy which saves me from a like sad state of health. Supping in a chamber of horrors must necessarily be followed by results extremely deleterious to the strongest constitution; can I not persuade you to eat a small piece of this omelette, to which the addition

of peaches preserved in brandy lends much simple charm?"

Jennifer accepted a moderate portion of omelette and consumed it with a measure of appreciation; the French cuisine pleased her, and she preferred a little meal of Strassburg pâté, with three young lettuce leaves, crisped and blanched, and a glass of bright champagne, to all the roast mutton and rice pudding of former years. It is possible that a really protracted residence in Paris might have encouraged in her a delicate imitation of Clarinda's plumpness; her brief stay in that paradise of gourmets could do no more than endow her with a mild taste for apricot tarts, doomed to complete frustration amid the vicissitudes of her subsequent career.

She reclined upon the smaller settee in that attitude later popularised by Madame Récamier; Gerald would never have admitted how well the discoloured gilding and pinkish-purple upholstery of the couch set off her powdered head curled like a Berlini cherub and her gown of white gauze sprinkled with diamond points and stars. He had engaged the leading hair-dresser of the day to arrange her hair every evening; its ardent hue and extravagant quantity made it amenable only to the highest skill; now she was crimped like a lamb and winged like a dove and crested like a breaking wave according to the artist's fancy, and all for the trivial price of twelve *livres* a month. She looked like nothing under the drab heaven of that hemisphere; such creatures infest the silver linings of thunderclouds and the farther side of the moon. Gerald himself had not fallen in with the usual superstition which rendered an immediate visit to a tailor and

barber absolutely requisite for the Englishman arrived in Paris overnight. He wore his flaxen hair powdered and dressed plainly and elegantly according to the accepted standards of a man of fashion in London; his black velvet suit, with very rich gold waistcoat and ruffles of the finest needlepoint Alençon, had nevertheless an air of sober dignity and restraint, befitting an Ambassador or a Prince of the blood.

"Would you have me blossom forth in the character of *petit maître*," he inquired loftily, when Jennifer ventured to admire a superb length of sky blue brocade which the tailor had submitted to her husband that very morning, "or execute a graceful and spirited harlequinade upon the stage of the Opéra Comique? I have no doubt that our dear good Grètry would be transported with joy at the prospect of composing the music incidental to such an exhibition on my part. We shall judge to-night whether indeed the fellow's skill be worthy the essay."

He laughed and sighed in the same breath; Paris had altered much since the halcyon days of his resplendent youth. "I remember his first success made a great stir in Paris; it met everywhere with unparalleled praise; *Le Huron*, I believe it was entitled. I did not witness it, being in India at the time; many of my French correspondents, writing to me of the season's musical and dramatic events, confused the inhabitants of that country with the North American Indian, among whom the Hurons are a horde or tribe. It was a diverting error on the part of a highly cultivated class of people. The piece which we are to attend this evening is called *Zémire*

*et Azer*; I judge by the name that the story is Oriental in origin; I trust you will find it both edifying and delightful. But music in France has suffered a sad decline; it was very different during my early Parisian visits; I recall vividly the fact that during my sojourn in this city in '64, Rameau was given a patent of nobility and the order of Saint Michael; *ehou, fugaces . . .!* Things are in a very bad way; Lulli has found no successor, and he, as you know, was an Italian. France is only less degenerate than our own unhappy nation; we must search further for signs of the ancient grandeur of art. The tragic drama in these days awakens sentiments of pity and terror of a nature very dissimilar to those aroused by the masterpieces of the Greeks; hysteric laughter chokes the tear ere it has fallen."

He desisted and, leaning his handsome head upon his beautifully moulded hand, appeared sunk in the most profound dejection. Jennifer had never seen him so deeply moved; she feared to address him, and was vastly relieved when the charming painted chariot drawn by a smart pair of horses, which attended them every day from seven in the morning until midnight, was announced by Mohammed; they drove at once to the opera. Gerald's darker fears were not realised; the performance was excellent, the audience brilliant and vivacious in the extreme; the number of distinguished members of the haut ton who stared at Jennifer and bowed to Gerald made the evening one of almost undiluted pleasure to both.

At breakfast the next morning Gerald was in admirable humour; he reverted to his conversation of

the night before, and dilated upon the same subject with an easy mastery of his theme and all the enthusiasm of hope. "I should not have said that Lulli has found no successor; such an one has been discovered in Vienna, by my old friend Le Blanc du Roulet, a musical amateur of faultless taste and exquisite discrimination. . . ." While dissecting his partridge with meticulous care he continued to address his wife upon the kindred arts of music, painting and letters; the drama he naturally placed under the latter classification. Jennifer could form no clearer idea of the meaning of his words than if he had been declaiming, as he frequently did, from the Greek of Æschylus, or debating with himself in one of the lesser-known Bengalese dialects.

"Beaumarchais is out of luck this winter; he has poisoned his wife and cannot get his play produced; there's a *Comédie Larmoyante* for you, more amusing than Diderot's. I have just received the last volume of that fellow's immortal work, the one containing the plates; the subscribers have been very patient."

"What is M. Diderot's great work, Gerald?" inquired Jennifer eagerly.

"Why that question? You are not generally so inquisitive?" He was laughing at her, but she persisted.

"Because a lady asked me last night whether or not I was happy in a marriage with M. Diderot's great work; I could not comprehend her meaning in the least."

Gerald laughed again.

"She meant that your husband was well-informed, my dear; I cannot take such a remark amiss."



"She also wished to know whether you were going to Russia with the rest of his library."

This time Gerald's face paled slightly with annoyance; he recovered his poise instantly; his third laugh was a little acid.

"They cannot forgive me for being cleverer than themselves; their Simian wits are exercised over my evident superiority. My eyes have been purged with euphrasy and rue; I see the mud in the kennels now, and the cracked lanterns, and the garbage on the Seine thicker than the lily-pads on the ponds of Versailles. They say of me, as Candide said of the noble Venetian, "*Rien ne peut lui plaire.*" I think in their hearts they are inclined to say also, in the words of the same simple fellow, "*Quel grand génie!*" Do not submit to their impertinence, my love; I shall be glad to provide you with a set of answers for all occasions."

Jennifer nodded meekly, shaking the powder from her loosely arranged hair until it shone red as copper leaves and festoons on the worn silver surface of well-polished Sheffield. She had a vague distrustful notion that he had been teasing her; she always experienced a like sensation when her father attempted to teach her Scotch history.

"It is an honour no less than a joy to instruct you, dear child," he went on affably. "You are as well born as any of these aristocrats, if we but accord belief to the widely credited story which assigns to the Earl of Tam-Linn the honour of being descended from Tamburlaine the Great; a not inconsiderable claim to royalty. I think your enormous eyes have a slight tendency to tip upwards at their outer corners; the length of your lashes is con-



fusing to an inquiring gaze, but I believe this to be true. You are a Tartar princess, and I no more than an Asian Jade in an undignified but admiring attitude."

"It isn't necessary to go back so very far as that, Gerald, in order to know that the Lorns have kingly blood in their veins," replied Jennifer with all the haughtiness of which her languor was capable. Gerald appeared distressed; he held up his hand reprovingly and the fine lace fell back to exhibit the blue veins in his own elegantly turned wrist.

"My darling," he implored, in a pained voice, "I beg of you, let us have no scandal. I should be heart-broken to believe that Paris was in any degree corrupting your exquisite mind; I have heard *that* story from your father; may its tragic nature excuse it somewhat from the charge of immorality."

"I confess I fail to understand you," cried Jennifer, almost reduced to tears. "I know very well, however, that the Tamburlaine tale is strictly true; my father has proven its veracity from ancient documents and ancestral jewels."

"I admit," said Gerald magnanimously, "that this legend is entirely proper, whether or not it be true."



#### 4. THE SHAGREEN SLIPPERS



**W**HEN Zeno, Barbaro, and Contarini came from Venice in 1474, as envoys to the court of Uzun Hasan, leader of the celebrated White Sheep Turcomans, they brought with them from the great republic a Scottish lady of surpassing beauty and unblemished character, one Lady Helena Lorn, of the famous house of Lorn and Carterhaugh. The fact that her sister had married Contarini probably accounted for her inclusion in the little party which arrived at the court of Uzun Hasan, in his magnificent city of Isfahan. This monarch's queen was a Christian princess, daughter of the Emperor of Trebizond, Calo Johannes, of the family of the Comneni; her name was Despina. Imagine the delight of the well-born Scottish sisters at being received by a lady who was at once a queen and a Christian; in those days there were no Calvinists. Alas, their happiness was but short-lived; the treacherous Barbaro conceived the dastardly plan of disposing of Helena Lorn by barter to a wealthy merchant of Isfahan; during the absence of her brother-in-law the horror was nearly consummated; the king was suffering from a passing indisposition, caused by the incautious consumption of a cup of sherbet prepared by his cousin's cook; the queen could not be summoned from her husband's bedside; the ex-

cellent Zeno was absent on a pleasure tour of the provinces. No course remained but flight, instant and swift; Helena bade her sister an anguished farewell and went forth alone into the night, disguised as a Kurdish shepherd boy in one of the woollen cloaks of immense and shaggy thickness much affected by these savage tribesmen, who employ them indiscriminately as great-coat and bedding; her little feet were shod in shoes of a bright emerald dye, fashioned from that shagreen leather which is still common in Isfahan. Her disguise was not penetrated; she had the good fortune to be a brunette, and though she was forced to sacrifice the rich abundance of her hair, there is small doubt that she appeared a youth of singular grace and symmetry of form and feature."

"Pray go on," exclaimed Jennifer, enraptured by this recital. "You lend the old story a fresh distinction by your manner of relating it; Gerald, I entreat you to continue." With a courtly bow, he complied with her request, which seemed to flatter him prodigiously.

"She wandered far, and passed through many astonishing and frightful adventures, in the midst of which her virtue and beauty were miraculously preserved. The belief persisted, however, in all who beheld her, that she was no more than a comely shepherd boy, and as such she was conveyed to the royal observatory at Samarkand, where a lad was required to polish the lenses of the great telescopes and assist the astronomers in the simpler mathematical computations; since the wild tribes of the desert first traced the circles of heaven upon the ruddy sands, Kurdish shepherds had always enjoyed

an enviable reputation as astronomical assistants. This renowned observatory had been built by Ulagh Bey, grandson of the great Tamburlaine himself; his father, Shah Rukh, had removed his capital to Herut, but the university at Samarkand continued to be a haunt for scholars, scientists and poets, where they found opportunities for study and meditation not afforded them by the more brilliant society of the court at Herut. Ulagh Bey was himself a poet and a patron of literature; his son had the bad taste to murder him, and was very properly put to death by his own troops some six months later. You are to understand that Persia is an extensive country; in this era it had a large variety of rulers, who saw fit to disagree among themselves at the cost of much bloodshed and insane violence. I cannot inform you with any degree of exactitude what particular descendant of the illustrious Tartar occupied the throne of his ancestors at Herut or Samarkand while Uzun Hasan reigned gloriously at Tabriz or Isfahan. This much is certain; the seventh son of the ruling monarch, in whose body flowed a divine elixir derived from Tamburlaine the Great, was at the time of Helena's desperate flight in charge of the royal observatory at Samarkand, whither he had been sent in order to complete his education under the kindly supervision of the historians Mirkhond and Khwadamir and the poets Jami and Hatifi.

"He was a young prince of pleasing address and engaging manners; his good looks were proverbial among the court beauties of Herut, several of whom had most immodestly followed him from home. He became interested in the pretty boy who showed

such skill in polishing his favourite lenses; upon discovering the sex of this charming creature he at once proposed honourable marriage, which was subsequently performed according to the ceremonies of both great branches of the Mohammedan faith and also those of the more ancient religion of Zoroaster; the young man was a convinced Sufi, but he desired to do all that lay in his power to protect the good name of his lovely bride; your father assures me that they were later united by the rites of the Roman Catholic Church by the Chaplain of King James the Second of Scotland in the royal chapel at Holyrood. . . . So much for any shadow of disrepute attaching to the name of Lady Helena Tamburlaine, or Tam-Linn, as the rude dialect of your peasants persisted in pronouncing it. The wedded lovers lost no time in repairing to Edinburgh by way of Constantinople and Venice; they made quite a stir in Scottish society of the period, and are even said to have visited persons of distinction in London, where they had the honour of being presented to his Majesty King Edward the Fourth of England."

"But my dear Gerald," exclaimed Jennifer with sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, "the wealth of detail which you have lavished upon this truly fascinating story delights me beyond words; my father never made it half so entertaining. You have a wonderful gift for narrative; this is far better than the Castle of Otranto."

"Assuredly, my love," replied her husband with complacency. "Would you like to hear a little more, which I have discovered from the same sources?"

"By all means; I need not be at my dressmaker's



for another hour, and then it is only to be fitted for a riding-habit which I shall never use, although it is a most becoming shade of green."

"There remains only to tell of the exceptional happiness of this strange union, then," said Gerald, "and to explain the fact that by means of various regrettable mishaps the male heirs to the Earldom, then of Carterhaugh, were one by one snatched away to the grave; finally only Helena and Signora Contarini were left; the sisters were twins, and the decease of a nurse had made the two noble orphans extremely doubtful as to which was the elder. If they had been boys it is probable that their sentiments would have been different; the curious tradition is that neither was willing to admit her seniority, and only the absence of the Signora at the Doge's scintillating court forced Helena to accept the title, which she naturally held in her own right, as Countess of Tamburlaine and Carterhaugh. She had some difficulty in persuading the king to allow her to incorporate the name of the conqueror of Asia in the good old Scottish appellation; the intervention of the Earl of Mar, a close family friend, decided the matter to the lady's satisfaction. The imprisonment and subsequent execution of that great noble was an unfortunate result of this act of kindness on his part; he was arrested on a charge of magic, and there is little doubt that his absorption in Persian poetry and the doctrines of Sufism were the original cause of the rumours which ended only with his death. A pity . . . there is nothing sadder than the sight of despotism discouraging literature and the mental graces.

"On the other hand, Mirza Tam-Linn, as he soon



came to be called, took a vast interest in what must now be regarded as his ancestral estates; he became a devout Catholic and a model landlord, and eschewing forever the secular poems of Jami and Hatifi, became deeply immersed in the works of the mediæval scholiasts; he was the real founder of your father's fine library; to him your family owes the large collection of manuscripts, including rare controversial writings by John Duns Scotus; your forebear ranged himself on the side of this cleric, as opposed to Saint Thomas Aquinas, on the subject of the Immaculate Conception. The early sacred carols of Scotland also engaged his attention; he wrote a number of ballads which are sung about the countryside to this day. He was one of Caxton's first patrons; during his visit to London he met this ingenious fellow at the house of Lord Rivers, the king's brother-in-law, whose 'Sayings of the Philosophers,' Caxton was then occupied in printing. Mirza acquired this valuable book, together with the *Morte d'Arthur*; your parent has not infrequently given thanks in my hearing for his ancestor's foresight and excellent taste.

"Always a poet to his finger-tips, he had no regrets for the astrolabes and mural quadrants of Samarkand; his time was passed in writing religious verse and riding over his vast but somewhat barren estates in company with his adored wife. He had the misfortune to lose this beautiful and intellectual woman at the birth of their sixteenth child; the remainder of his days was passed in study and literary composition. His favourite book was Caxton's edition of the 'Golden Legend, or Lives of

the Saints,' based upon the 13th century 'Legenda Aurea' of Jacobus de Voragine; of his own writings, which were unfortunately never published until Bishop Percy included some of them in his recent collection, he was inclined to give first place to his refreshingly romantic Ballad of Tam-Linn, though he composed various dirges and elegies which were more in keeping with his own incurably serious habit of mind. His mastery of the Scots tongue was amazing; he knew Gaelic in all its branches, and was an accomplished performer upon the bag-pipes."

Gerald paused for breath, and drained his glass; his face was intent and almost melancholy in its expression.

"I cannot really like that part so well as the beginning," sighed Jennifer, "though, of course, it is highly interesting in its way; he must have been a very remarkable man."

"He was," said Gerald.

"One small point may still be worth mentioning," Gerald continued. "As it partly concerns you, my dearest, you may not find it entirely dull, though there are some fairly long words in it. I have said before that Helena was a pronounced brunette; one of the Black Lorns, you observe. On the contrary, Signora Contarini was radiantly red like yourself; in Venice this colouring is immensely admired, and she was by all accounts considered the most beautiful woman at the Doge's court. She had a daughter, even lovelier than she, by name Grizel Lucretia Cecelia Contarini; tradition has it that this incomparable creature was the original of many of

Titian's most resplendent ladies; her exalted social position precludes the possibility of her having sat for some of these masterpieces, but it is certainly true that the painter used to follow her about the watery highways of Venice, his little gondola, equipped with a small telescope and a portable easel, gliding in the wake of her gorgeous barge through long azure afternoons and yellow sunsets, in the course of which he produced a large variety of sketches immortalising her superhuman beauty forever.


"On a visit to her uncle and aunt at Carterhaugh during her nineteenth year she conceived a violent attachment for her cousin Malcolm, eldest son of the Tam-Linns; the young man warmly reciprocated her affection. Some objections were raised by Helena on the score of consanguinity; these were ably seconded by Signora Contarini, who had every hope of uniting her daughter to the heir of one of the great Roman or Florentine houses. She, as a well-born woman, had always regretted the fact that Venice was a republic, and as such not fit to rank with ancient empires and dukedoms; the idea of losing her little girl in the black frosts of a Scotch winter was too much for her patriotism, however; she wrote to Grizel bidding her return at once to Venice.

"The course of true love was in this case not to be so easily interrupted; Malcolm's evident misery softened his mother's proud heart, while news of Grizel's imminent decline caused the more emotional Signora Contarini to dispatch her consent instantly, together with a number of costly jewels and several hundred yards of the richest products of the looms

of Venice; a small copy of Titian's Sacred and Profane Love was included as a wedding gift to Malcolm. This could not fail to please him owing to the fact that of the two figures occupying the canvas one was said to be an excellent portrait of his bride."



## 5. THE BASKET OF WHITE ROSES

ERALD desisted, and helped himself to a small bunch of white grapes. Jennifer was pleased with that part of the story dealing with the red-haired Contarini; she besought him to continue, but he was firm.

“You are already long overdue at your dress-maker’s; go at once, my dear, and while you are there, kindly order a white velvet riding-habit and a hat to match, with the longest plume it is possible to find in Paris; the hat itself should be fairly large, but sharply turned up on the right side. I wish you to wear it with your hair unpowdered; here the effect would be too startling, but in India I think we may allow ourselves a little *bizarrerie* to brighten the monotony of our days. You will ride only in the evening; the effect under a tropic moon should be picturesque in the extreme. If you fear the weight of velvet—though the best velvet of Lyons is remarkably soft and light—I should suggest a heavy corded silk. But follow your own inclination, by all means, my dear; you understand my idea about the hat, I am sure.”

He kissed her good-bye with unusual tenderness, and reflecting that he had been perhaps a thought trying in his educational methods of late, went out determined to discover some charming trifle as an appropriate gift for the poor child. He intended originally to buy her some lace, of which she was

inordinately fond, but while he was engaged in examining a scarf of French needle-point with ground of *réseau rosacé* almost entirely covered by a design of great intricacy and beauty, he remembered that only the preceding week he had been told of an exquisite red jasper bowl, or *brûle-parfum*, mounted in gilt bronze by Gouthière and now going at the ridiculous price of one thousand *livres* thanks to its owner's sudden financial embarrassment; d'Aumont would already have possessed himself of the treasure but for the fact that he had recently purchased a duplicate; it was great luck, thought Gerald, that the duke had not availed himself of this opportunity of having the pair. Such a chance could not be idly thrown away; Gerald hurried to the house of the unfortunate banker whose double personality had attempted to combine the pursuit of high finance and the collection of various airy or sumptuous works of art.

Bailiffs were already upon the scene; the auctioneer, a small sagacious individual in black merino, was directing his two blue-jowled assistants in the business of displaying to their best advantage the remaining pieces of furniture and bits of porcelain and ormolu; an immense Aubusson carpet, of tender colouring and chaste design, was flung to one side of the long drawing-room; pushed back against the panelling were many precious lacquer cabinets, consoles and tables in marquetry, columns and vases in porphyry, jasper, and choice marbles and transparent clays of China and Japan. Gerald was sincerely touched; the sight of the library beyond, its walls a rich and sombre mosaic of gilded leather, faintly scented with the exotic perfumes of Morocco,



Russia, and Spain, affected him painfully; the glimpse he caught of a lean figure bending over a disordered writing-desk forced him to have recourse to his pocket-handkerchief and a cleverly simulated cough.

The tragedy would have been more intolerable if its protagonist had been able to boast of aristocratic connections; nevertheless he was deserving of the heartiest sympathy. Gerald debated within himself whether or no he should venture into the library to offer a word of well-bred condolence on the loss of those cherished volumes whose absence was already blackening the walls with unsightly patches of sheer emptiness; only the immediate necessity of bidding for the jasper bowl prevented him from translating this humane thought into suitable action. . . . He obtained the ravishing object for nine hundred *livres*; it was a decided bargain at the price.

Gerald carried it home in his own hands; in spite of its great weight he was able, with the help of a hired cabriolet and his remarkable muscular strength, to convey it direct to their hotel, where he spent the entire evening regarding it with a passionate admiration, refusing to attend a small and select gathering in a certain celebrated salon at the Convent of Saint Joseph, though he had since his earliest visit to Paris been *persona grata* in that particular quarter. Jennifer was relieved; she enjoyed examining the minutiae of detail which Gerald pointed out to her so eagerly, and she was glad enough to escape the terrifying formality which froze her chilly young blood in most of the great drawing-rooms of Paris. The jasper bowl was too

lovely to part from, even for a matter of hours; Gerald knew in his heart that he would never give it to his wife so long as he lived; at the moment he could almost have sworn that if it had come to a choice between them, he would have selected his newer acquisition to have and to hold forever. This is not so strange as might appear at first when it is taken into consideration that the bowl was cut from a superb piece of jasper, mounted in gilt bronze, with satyrs' heads bearing dependent festoons of vine-leaves; within the feet a serpent was coiled to spring. It stood upon his writing-table until the day of his death.

The following day he purchased for his wife, for the sum of exactly one hundred *livres*, a scarf similar in design and only a little inferior in quality to the one he had first considered. She was enchanted, and wore it that very same night to an important reception at the British Ambassador's; Gerald, viewing the charming effect of the frail web of lace encircling her white shoulders between the ivory satin of her gown and the string of Indian pearls which he had picked up under such strange circumstances at the court of the Nawab of Murshidabad, decided that his gift was far prettier and more appropriate for a lady than even the most exquisite of *objets d'art*; women always preferred something to wear, and by no stretch of the imagination could he conceive of Jennifer's fragility striving to support the heavy burden of the jasper bowl; she would have to be transformed into marble first.

For a moment his fancy saw her thus, with flying draperies by the royal goldsmith, set in a blue vista at Versailles; then he realised that under those cir-

cumstances she would undoubtedly be the property of the king; he dispelled the vision from his eyes with one sweep of his long fingers, and went on with his game of vingt-et-un as soberly as if he cared for nothing on earth but the cards and the supper, being enabled to practice this dissimulation the more readily through caring quite sincerely for both of these mitigating and blameless pleasures amid the vast melancholy of the universe.

Meanwhile Jennifer was engaged in an adventurous exploration of the conservatory; the fact of finding herself in an English house had encouraged her greatly, and she was now valiantly setting forth alone in search of a white camellia and a spray of maiden's-hair fern, which floral ornament she rightly considered would lend the completing touch of modishness to her costume; the roses, jasmine, carnations, exotic lilies, and streaked and spotted orchises upon the laced and jewelled bosoms of the other ladies strengthening her in the supposition that this final grace was as necessary to the woman of fashion as a painted fan with mother-of-pearl sticks or a pair of gloves of glazed and supple kidskin.

The long conservatory was dimly lit; after the scintillant atmosphere of the ball-room, where brilliance was shattered into prismatic confusion by countless tinkling icicles of glass in sconce and chandelier, it was a lane of blue dusk, a tropic night striped with stupendous fronds; it was vaulted with palms and hung with ropes of fragrance. High overhead three incredible moons floated in space; the yellow Chinese tissue of which they were fashioned bore a thin tracery of wave and cloud upon its distended surface, where golden dragons wal-

lowed and swarmed in battle. Jennifer drew a shivering breath of amazement; the scene enchanted her to the point of tears, disquieting her slightly at the same time; she leaned against a great black lacquer cabinet in an attitude of unstudied innocence tinctured with timidity; her head was turned over her shoulder, her little hand was laid upon her breast.

In another instant she might have become a crystal fountain or a tree of white flowers, to be immemorially lost in the British Ambassador's conservatory; some such catastrophe was perhaps averted by the sudden appearance of a young man, who burst through the elaborate trellises and festoons of foliage evincing the same charming impetuosity with which the nimble prince clove his way through the prickly half-acre hedge around the Sleeping Castle. The nymph, who had feared the advent of Apollo in the character of an elderly Academician or a verse-making Marquis with a lisp, relaxed again into mortal flesh; a glance at the stranger's frank and open countenance sufficed to show that the danger was at most pleasantly negligible; the conservatory was the poorer by one silver cascade or scented rose-bush, and Jennifer was weeping distractedly in the arms of the unknown.

"At last I have found you!" cried the young man in accents vibrant with joy; "I have even had the supreme good fortune to find you when you were evidently in want of assistance; to speak of beauty in distress were impertinence; to liken you to Ariadne were immediately to suggest the absurd comparison of myself with Perseus; may I venture to recall to your mind the homely proverb that a

friend in need is a friend indeed?" With which gallant and respectful speech he produced a pocket-handkerchief of fine cambric and applied its softness to her streaming eyes, at the same time patting her gently but firmly upon the shoulder. Jennifer derived great comfort from his reassuring actions; the lively terror which she had experienced in the expectation of beholding a foreigner was entirely dissipated by the youth's appearance.

"Oh, my dear sir," she cried somewhat hysterically, "what felicity to know that you are English, or at the very worst, Scotch! I do most deeply appreciate your kindness, coming at it does from one with whom I am as yet unacquainted!"

The young man wrinkled his pale-brown eyebrows in bewilderment, simultaneously implanting upon the highest curl of Jennifer's *coiffure* a kiss so light and fleeting that its pressure failed to disturb even so much as a grain of powder from that airy convolution, which resembled nothing half so much as a butterfly poised for flight.

"But why—why—my adored angel—if I may be permitted so to address in all reverence one whom I have long dared to worship from afar—why should I be, of all things under heaven, Scotch? I was born in Kent, near Sevenoaks, where my ancestral mansion is prettily situated. My mother's family are natives of Berkshire; their home is the most northerly point I have as yet attained in my travels through Great Britain. It is true that my tutor, though a Welshman, is a friend of Mr. Hume's; possibly I may have picked up an accent from the worthy man, but it seems more probable that what you mistake for a Caledonian twang is in reality a



trace of the Italian language lingering upon my tongue; I have but lately arrived in Paris after an extended stay in Rome and a tour of the more important Italian towns. I hope you do not find my manner of speaking distasteful to you; if so I will hasten to alter it to the best of my ability; I will intone to you the sonorous chants of the priests of Baal or the songs of the ancient Chaldean shepherds if it will but please you a little; if you will smile I might even be valiant enough to speak French."

"Oh, no, no," entreated Jennifer pitifully, "I never wish to hear that detestable jargon again. . . . It is a veritable *mélange* of truly shocking improprieties, so far as I can judge. How different was the vocabulary of the good nuns of the Parthemont; I am quite sure they were totally ignorant of most of the expressions commonly used in the most exalted society in France. There was *Athalie*, to be sure . . . but that was poetry. Now I hear nothing but such words as *amour—admiration—désespoir—adoration—ange pur—cœur dur—cœur insensible—beauté terrible—cruelle—tellement belle—o ciel!*"

Jennifer was rapidly losing her self-control; dreadful memories of even more passionate phrases, murmured in low voices and looked as speakingly from imploring eyes, caused her to shudder violently and cling closer to the young man's protecting arm.

"But that is poetry too, in a way—though I doubt whether a severe stylist would admit that last rhyme. Those are not wicked words; in fact I am at this very instant planning to translate them into English and repeat them to you, with such connect-



ing verbs, articles, and prepositions as will presently make clear their very humble meaning. Only tell me this; why did you think that, at the worst, I might be Scotch?"

"Because your voice reminded me of my brothers, but they, to be sure, went to Oxford, and all the Lorns laugh at them."

"Ah, that accounts for it, then," the sprightly youth continued, "I also attended that University; I have little hope that I should escape the Lorns' laughter, which I am sure is disconcertingly hearty."

"Oh, it is indeed," agreed Jennifer fervently. "You know they are so unfeeling as to call me Jenny Forlorn, and to make great game of my wrists and ankles."

"Your wrists and ankles are the most delicate experiments in turned ivory that I have so far had the privilege of observing," he returned. "The Pope's smallest comfit-box is clumsy in comparison. I have no objection to your being Jenny, but Forlorn you shall never more be, now that I have found you."

This time Jennifer felt the kiss upon her hair; the fact that the boy's light voice was so singularly like her brothers' seemed to make the caress a mere matter of course.

"Let us sit down," said the young man, "I have much to say to you."

They sat side by side upon a small couch of vermillion lacquer; they made a remarkably pretty pair, and numbered a possible thirty-six years between them. If the boy was nineteen, as he subsequently stated, his appearance was juvenile even for that inconsiderable degree of age; Jennifer had not

seemed so ridiculously young since she had picked cream-coloured roses in Devonshire, during the preceding summer. Next to her shimmering white gown, the blue of his suit was black in the half-darkness; she stared intently into his face, and saw that he had a fair complexion and very brilliant hazel eyes, wide-open and rather round, a short nose, and the mouth of an irresponsible angel; his powdered hair she judged to be of the same pale brown as his straight furry eyebrows. He looked charmingly and obscurely mischievous; his mouth was grave, but his eyes were full of a wild hilarity and a wilder triumph.

Without the door a capital band of stringed instruments was rendering a selection of Italian airs; supper was in progress, the dancing had for the moment ceased, and none drew near to disturb them. A tenuously stately toccata seemed to allay the moving atmosphere of light and perfume and far-off laughter; Jennifer listened in a quiet enchantment, her hands clasped loosely around her slender knees. The boy was silent also for a moment, but she could feel the tense excitement and exultant restlessness in his thin body; his pointed fingers beat irregular time to the music; within his throat a little sound of humming began and ended and began again; once he sang a line or two in the lively ghost of a tenor, pronouncing the words clearly in an unpretentiously impeccable accent, and glancing sideways at Jennifer with his bright faun's eyes to see whether she was admiring him. He was completely at his ease; he seemed to be savouring a secret happiness which filled him with hardly restrained mirth. Jennifer liked him enormously; she felt as if she

must have known him for years; as if he must have come to her Christmas parties long ago in a pale blue suit and a white ruffle and a close fitting cap of golden curls. She waited patiently for him to speak; she knew he was about to say something interesting.

"At last I have found you!" he repeated, in accents rendered thrilling by the little vibration in his voice, compounded equally of laughter and emotion. "I saw you first in a Hackney coach in London, last October . . . I do not recall what you were wearing at the time, but I know that you appeared to me a seraph robed in snow—"

"That must have been my ermine mantle—"

"And again in the gardens of the Tuileries; night was falling; you seemed a star in darkness—"

"And that was my black velvet *pelisse*, without doubt," cried Jennifer with warm interest. "Was I not wearing at the same time a white veil?"

"Veil?" exclaimed the youth. "O lovely sound—sweet augury, ecstatic hope—what visions are conjured up by that one word! And there above our innocent heads hang clustered oranges, by all that is holy I declare they do, wreathed in their own blossoms; how different from that insidious fruit of Eden whose coarser grain should never be permitted to intrude into the diet of pure romance! I refer to the apple, whose part in the story I always thought the more contemptible because of its wicked passivity throughout; a veritable copper's nark of apples, in my opinion, and far worse than the snake. But this is no fit conversation for your remarkably small and symmetrical ears; the question I desired to ask you was quite simple, yet full of homely

morality; it is this; will you be so good as to marry me at once?"

For an absurdly happy second Jennifer's whirling thoughts flew like a released swallow towards a minute and sunny opening at the end of a dark tunnel; then they folded their wings again in resignation; in spite of the fact that it was impossible to avail herself of the young man's offer, it gave her a sense of security.

"My dear sir," she faltered, "I cannot accept your highly flattering proposal; unfortunately I am already married."

"Ah," said the youth, rather wanly, and again with a slight sigh. "Ah, that is indeed a pity."

Then his face brightened once more, and he recovered his spirits with something like a mental pirouette.

"But perhaps your husband is very old, or perhaps, though still in the prime of life, he will perish shortly of one of those malignant fevers which so often follow an indulgence in Seine water as a beverage; I trust he is an abstainer from wines and liquors, unless of course he is an habitual drunkard, which would, unless his constitution be of iron, answer quite as well the exigencies of our case. For your own part, I entreat you to drink only the *Eau du Roi* of Chantilly, a pure spring water imported into Paris at some expense; you must give me your word of honour that you will on no account touch any other drink, at the same time religiously concealing from your husband the existence of such an article; I shall send you some tomorrow concealed in a gigantic basket of white roses; if your husband has the bad taste to look

into the basket, the crystal element will be at once metamorphosed, rather in the manner of Ovid than of Saint Elizabeth, into creamy petals impearled with dew; there will be no card in the basket, but your heart will tell you whence it came. Drink the water, eat the roses—you perceive of course that I have been studying, under the guidance of my tutor, the Latin of Apulieus—and all may yet be well. Meanwhile there is surely no marital duty so severe and pressing as to render you unable to join a small picnic, jaunt, or excursion which my aunt is making to-morrow into the wilds of Fontainebleau. My aunt is the first cousin of our Ambassador; I am her favourite nephew; need I say more?"

Jennifer looked at him carefully; she thought she had never seen so engaging a countenance, having naturally long ago forgotten the young man of the black loveknot.

"I cannot tell you," she cried in a voice which for her was remarkably enthusiastic, "with what gratitude and pleasure I have listened to your words; surely the superiority of the English is well demonstrated by the fact that whereas the majority of the French gentlemen whom I meet insult me with proposals of the most heinous nature, you have at once made me an offer of marriage and, finding that I was quite powerless to accept this, have courteously followed it with a plan for formally introducing me to your aunt and conveying me to Fontainebleau under the protection of this lady. It has also been a great relief to talk to you of my troubles; I can hardly express to you the agony of mind which I have endured recently, and which I have feared to



impart to my husband lest it result in the death of various persons of rank and fashion, none of whom are to be sure particularly worthy of esteem, but who possess in nearly every instance either an aged mother or an affectionate wife and family to whom their loss could hardly fail to be disturbing."

"May I inquire your husband's name, Madam," the boy asked with gravity; when Jennifer whispered low the one word "Poynyard," pronouncing it with a measure of awe, he nodded sagely.

"Ah, yes, to be sure—I might have known. But let me hasten to set at least a portion of your fears at rest; I am acquainted with your husband; he would never kill, only cane with extreme severity. I know precisely the sort of cane which he would employ; a thin and sinister wand, of pale straw colour, with spots of a most peculiar and malignant brown; a truly serpentine cane, which might be one of Medusa's locks fallen down over her eyes and forthwith magicked into supple stone for the flaying alive of poor lovers. I should dislike extremely to feel its fang in my own meagre shoulder-blades, I assure you; none the less I am determining upon venturing so far as Fontainebleau. Let us, for one day, be babes in the wood sheltering from a more than avuncular wrath behind the petticoats of my excellent aunt, a rare and lovely creature, a good twenty years my deceased uncle's junior; she is a woman of brave spirit tempered with discretion; would that my dear mother were like her in certain qualities which it would be unfilial to formulate into words! We are singularly lucky in being able to count upon her assistance in the matter of the picnic."



He leaned back with a lazy smile upon his countenance, after allowing an apparently wholly unconscious kiss to smooth away the bewilderment from Jennifer's innocent brow.

"But, my dear sir," she began, "how is it possible for you to escape asking my husband to join your proposed excursion, and if my husband comes . . ." Her pause was eloquent, but less so than the tongue of the persuasive young man.

"Of course, my dearest love—or rather I should say, as more *convenable* as yet, my dear Madam—of course if he comes our day will be completely ruined. Are we not to hire a pair of dashing steeds and gallop madly through the forest glades, avoiding by the veriest hair's-breadth the vast and polished trunks of beeches, painted a strange subaqueous green by the light that filters through their leaves—but no, it is now November—let us avoid instead the stately boles of great oak trees—shall we not avoid those russet monarchs of the wood by the unlikeliest fraction of an infant's hair, while my pretty aunt is plucking lavender and reviving memories of Sevenoaks in the English Garden? Shall we not moreover wander along the more exiguous paths and alleys, treading warily lest we step upon the adders which infest these sylvan haunts; shall we not explore the celebrated *Gorge aux Loups*, plumbing its caverns in the fearful hope of arousing one of the lean grey shapes which roam it still by moonlight? Do you not, in short, adore danger of the most deadly description, and would not the presence of your husband dust a bright romantic bloom from the appalling adventures which we are about to undertake?"

Jennifer considered his words with demure composure; she harboured not the slightest doubt of the high seriousness of this surprising speech, but the idea of peril, usually so repellent to her mind, was by some curious alchemy made alluring by the spell of the young man's conversation; the adders even lost their terrors in her prophetic conviction that he would prove competent to deal with snakes, wolves, and spirited horses with equal facility, and that without the necessity of drawing his sword or raising his voice.

"I should certainly enjoy myself more if dear Gerald did not accompany us," she admitted. "But how can you possibly contrive to prevent his coming, since in common courtesy he must be invited?"

"The simplest thing in the world," the youth explained with a wave of his hand. "My aunt shall invite him; she is unfortunately quite beautiful, but I will instruct her to wear an unbecoming costume; I have in mind a snuff-coloured cloth mantle the purchase of which I strongly deprecated at the time; a use has now been found for it, which is very gratifying, as it is both costly and durable, and I had forbidden her to wear it in my presence. She shall speak encouragingly of certain ladies languishing to meet Mr. Poynyard; they shall be the most egregious bores to be found in Paris; my aunt knows an astonishing number of bores, as my late uncle insisted upon her making his friends her own. Your husband is certain to refuse; he does not suffer fools gladly. For your part, you have but to exhibit a mild reluctance, and the day is won; we shall be eating white grapes at Fontainebleau before the week is out."

He clasped her to him in an ingenuous embrace, at the same time kicking his smart scarlet heels in the air and clashing his silver shoe-buckles together in a somewhat frivolous elation of soul. Jennifer gave a long despairing sigh; his final words had killed the last little fluttering hope in her breast.

"Alas," she moaned. "I might have foreseen this; all is lost, my friend." And she subsided into bitter sobs once more, to the vast derangement of his Italian point ruffle, which in her confusion she used to staunch her tears under the impression that it was the fine cambric pocket-handkerchief of her first consolation at his hands. "The white grapes of Fontainebleau; how could I have forgotten the ominous sound of those words, which I hear pronounced above the breakfast table every morning of my life? My only excuse is that I am customarily very sleepy, but this does not explain my extraordinary stupidity. Oh, if that is the spot where they grow exquisite white grapes under glass I fear we must abandon hope at once; if it is also the spot where some one signed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes and some one else murdered her secretary, there is no conceivable chance remaining to us. There is an end forever and ever to our poor picnic; I do most heartily wish I had never been born."

The young man held her closer; there were tears in his own eyes, and having found the handkerchief, he dabbed at them quite openly.

"How very unlucky—but how amazingly unlucky—" he kept repeating. "And are you sure the place has such an attraction for him—might not the adders counteract the Edict of Nantes?"

"Do not waste your time in vain imaginings, my dear friend, my dear . . ." said Jennifer sadly. "I knew in the bottom of my heart that such happiness could not be for me." And she fell into quiet weeping, while endeavouring to draw her string of pearls far enough in advance of her pointed chin to observe their lustre and extract a minute but present comfort from their pierced and luminous globes. "But, oh, if only I might have worn my new green riding-habit; if only we might have discovered the wolves' cavern; if only we might have picked lavender with your aunt in the English garden!"

He gazed at her with childish and companionable pity; he had no more gay words wherewith to console her.

With clasped hands and questioning eyes, they looked long at each other; he noted the length of her drenched eyelashes and she the engaging golden freckles upon the straight bridge of his nose. At last they drew slowly apart; an unreasonable but utter hopelessness blurred their steady gaze. Jennifer had in some mysterious fashion infected the mercurial youth with her own quiet lassitude; it seemed useless and wearisome to struggle against odds which now assumed the aspect of a monstrous growth in shapes of fear and shadows of disaster.

The boy saw this lovely child immured in solitude and deprived of sustenance; he saw a room without a fireplace whose one long dusty window afforded a grey prospect of chimney-pots; the place was draughty and rats scampered behind the grumbling plaster of the walls. Jennifer imagined the flick of the cruel cane across that white and ingenuous brow, and the red mark drawn there seemed to

draw blood from her heart; she saw a youthful hero, lacking weapons, in a suicidal leap at a giant's throat; her hands went over her eyes and she shuddered. Both shuddered; both despaired; they were silent as a pair of exquisite wax dolls under the enormous canopy of flowers.

In the mind of each the pitiless play continued; the door of the narrow room opened with a mercifully blinding burst of light; the little figure by the window screamed and swooned away in the renewed darkness, now stirred into sinister motion by an unknown presence; at this dreadful presentiment the boy leaned limply against Jennifer's shoulder, while she swayed dizzily in contemplating the cane extended into a huge snake, mottled yellow and brown upon the pulsations of its scales, and now slowly encircling the slight body of her young friend; she heard the small bones snap under the relentless pressure.

Perhaps the cloudy and suffocating fragrance of the tropical plants may have contained some taint of a narcotic poison; the boy found it necessary to bring the flint and steel of his wit and courage very sharply together to waken a flash of his former gaiety; he prattled for a doomed instant of the gardens of Luxembourg, Condé, and Soubise as possible meeting-places; he spoke of the promenade along the fortifications and the *parterres* of the Archbishop near Nôtre Dame, but in his soul he knew that their pretty dream was ended; each was a coward for the other's sake. In all the strange and varied trials and adventures of his later years, the memory of that night remained intact and perfect, like a pastoral scene upon a prince's coach-



panel or a classic instance modelled skillfully in tinted clay.

They kissed, gently and sorrowfully; their fingers clung and fell apart; in another moment a tall Hungarian officer in the green furred jacket and pale grey breeches of the Nadasdy Hussars was bowing over Jennifer's cold hand to claim the dance for which the Italian musicians were already tuning their delicate instruments; she went without a word or a backward glance, a young Eurydice never to be reclaimed by the blithe Orpheus of Fontainebleau Forest.

The boy sat whistling softly for perhaps half an hour; he was very tired. At the end of that time he rose and entered the supper room; after three glasses of champagne and a *meringue glacé* he felt much better; he then most sensibly proceeded to go home, where he had an excellent night's sleep, quite untroubled by dreams of love or indigestion.

For a whole week Jennifer was inconsolable; she wept continually, and grew so thin that Gerald spent many hours seated by her side, with a silver spoon in one hand and a glazed pot of Chantilly cream in the other; every time she opened her little mouth he put a spoonful of cream into it, and as she was not in the least hungry she found it simpler to preserve an absolute silence which assisted her greatly in concealing the reason for her extreme sadness. Gerald took it for granted that another access of nostalgia had descended upon the poor child; as he could not consider even the briefest stay in Devonshire he talked for some time of a restful month at Montpellier; only the atrocious hotel which he remembered as the best afforded by that notoriously



salubrious town prevented him from putting this kindly plan into execution.

The proposal, brought forward by Gerald, that his wife should have her miniature painted succeeded in restoring her to her natural health and spirits, never very strong or vivid at the best. Her husband had entertained strong hopes of Greuze; a canvas by that incomparable hand would be the very net for trapping all the wings and petals and diaphanous airs of Jennifer's beauty. The thing was not to be; the artist was still sulking and remote; he had refused to exhibit since the unfortunate incident of *Sevère et Caracalla* in '69. Gerald could remember the storm of ridicule brought down upon the painter's head when this amazing historical work was suspended side by side with the delicious *Petite Fille au Chien Noir*; it was one of those dreadful attempts at the grand manner which upon the stage turns Mercutio into Timon and upon the printed leaf spoils an excellent rondeau to produce a vile imitation of Racine. Gerald had been deeply distressed at the time; his clear recollection of the *annus mirabilis* of '65 sharpened his regret at the fiasco; when he thought of those thirteen small case-ments opening upon Arcadia he could have wept as bitterly as the young girl who wept for her dead bird in that pure atmosphere.

He had himself condescended to wait upon M. Greuze, immediately following his arrival in Paris; a half-promise was made but never redeemed; the painter forfeited the privilege of beholding that lady whose loveliness he failed to embalm forever behind a few layers of pale and rosy paint and a thin lacquer of tawny varnish. If he conceived of her

as the typical Englishwoman of the Frenchman's fancy, he might easily have drowned himself in the Seine upon realising the chance he had missed; there lived no dove in any golden age whose death produced a grief so exquisite as that which overflowed the eyes of Jennifer Lorn, as she lay along the faded crimson couch in a translucent garment of black gauze, while tears of an incredible brightness blinded her with their prisms.

A fashionable miniature painter begged for the favour of transferring some small portion of her charm to ivory; Gerald consented, and the thing was done. It served the purpose of rousing Jennifer to life; her vanity prevailed upon her to smile, and her sense of duty forced her to give faithfully a sufficient number of sittings to permit the little work of art to be finished in time for Gerald's birthday. Only the fact that at the last minute it was discovered that the pearls were not included among the accessories of the painted costume caused a delay which eventually resulted in Gerald's forced departure without the delightful object; Jennifer bought a snuff-box as a substitute, but being upon the high seas at the time, totally forgot to present it to him. Later she found it extremely useful as a receptacle for pins.

The poor girl's exceeding sorrow lasted a full week; she could not, during all that period, free herself from affectionate memories of the young man of the conservatory. At the end of the seventh day, she was forced to interview the miniature-painter in order to arrange a sitting for the morrow; his intelligent suggestions as to her dress, which was to approximate as nearly as possible to that of an

ideal Diana, and his very interesting anecdotes of his youngest and favourite daughter distracted Jennifer's mind, gave her a slight appetite for supper, and sent her to sleep dreaming of the precocious comments of Mathilde upon the occasion of her first communion.

The sittings were uniformly pleasant; the artist's timidity would have precluded the possibility of presumptuous compliments had his virtue not rendered such liberties naturally repellent to his mind; Jennifer always recalled him with satisfaction as the only Frenchman who had neglected to make love to her; she never forgot the names of his children or the different species of roses which he proposed to cultivate on retiring to a peaceful old age in his native town of Tours. She would have regretted profoundly his death at the hands of the public executioner at a considerably later date, had there existed the remotest chance of the sad story being brought to her attention after the passage of so many unimaginable years.

She was sitting, in her character of Queen and Huntress, as close to the fire as her voluminous draperies permitted; a gilded bow slung across her shoulders adding but little to the warmth of a costume better suited to Mount Olympus than to a Parisian *salon* whose six long windows were even now bombarded by a wind from the Steppes of Russia; a peppering of sleet teased the window panes and hissed upon the fire. She shivered like a silver aspen, and then, less romantically, sneezed in a pathetic manner; the artist's heart was torn, because the necessity of doing full justice to the pearls made it unadvisable to allow her to transfer her ermine

scarf from the chair-back to her own throat. He bent above his table, balancing the magnifying-glass carefully in his left hand while his right stippled a transparent shadow of carmine upon the minute presentiment of her mouth smiling from the ivory; it was simple, since the child was tired, to add a touch of rose-colour to the counterfeited cheek, instead of demanding a rouge box and a hare's foot to improve the pallor of the true one.

"Oh, yes," he said with gentle satisfaction, "Armand and Pierre rarely quarrel now; the incident was very amusing, but their mother would have been alarmed at its repetition; I was obliged to speak quite seriously to them, and I am happy to say that they are now another David and Jonathan among brothers."

"How charming," cried Jennifer with sympathetic pleasure. "And do not forget to relate the story you promised me of Suzanne's adventure with the currant-jam!"

At this moment Gerald entered the room; his air was cheerful, but a look of strong determination narrowed his lips and eyes in a way which to his wife's quick apprehension portended words or deeds of a strenuous and fatiguing sort.

"I have heard direct from Calcutta," he exclaimed with emphasis; "Sullivan works against me in London; there is no time to be lost; I must have the friendship of Hastings himself, or go down like a nine-pin. We sail from Gravesend in three days; if the winds are favourable we may perhaps achieve a single night in Saint Albans Street, if you think it worth the trouble. I regret that we shall have no time in which to acquaint your parents with our

plans; I myself shall be infinitely put out at the impossibility of bidding my poor old father farewell; I can scarcely hope to find him alive on my next visit to England. I trust you will endeavour to subdue your filial sentiments of sorrow in so far as to assist me in every way in making the journey as expeditious as may be; wifely affection should give you courage for this small sacrifice; it is rarely I make any demand upon you whatever."

Jennifer rose hastily, gathering the folds of her tunic and mantle over her arm; as she fled from the room the parquet flooring struck cold as the black ice of mid-winter through her flimsy gilt sandals. The painter flung the heavy ermine scarf around her shoulders as she passed, earning thereby a dark look from Gerald and a word of agitated gratitude and farewell from the lady.

"It is a pity," he told his wife that evening, "that one could not have adopted this unlucky child; I fear she is destined for great unhappiness."

His wife looked up from her embroidery frame; because he was a fashionable miniature painter she no longer knitted. The excellent soup for which they were even now waiting, the like of which had nourished the artist's soul for twenty years, was in these days of affluence prepared by the cook; it was not quite so good as formerly, but Madame took infinite satisfaction in the recovered whiteness of her tapering fingers. She examined him kindly with her quizzical brown eyes before replying.

"How old is she?" she questioned.

"Not yet eighteen; a child, only a child, beautiful and unfortunate. She would have been exactly the proper age for Pierre." A different quality crept into his wife's voice; she gazed at his bent head with



an expression which she would have thought it pure folly to permit him to observe.

"You are very romantic, my friend, and not very practical. Do you think the possessor of those pearls"—she tapped the ivory sharply with her pointed finger-nail—"could ever have been content to wed a mere civil-servant—brilliant, it is true, but—?" Her shrug was eloquent of many things, incredulity, amusement, and a slight contempt for Jennifer, a restrained but fiery pride in Pierre, an exasperated adoration for her husband. His lowered eyes missed the pantomime of gesture and glance; he was intent upon the picture.

"Undoubtedly, if they could have known each other," he said calmly; he was too wise to add, "Her tastes are very simple." She leaned towards him; her clever eyes surveyed the small seraphic face lying so helplessly in the palm of his hand.

"You are right, my friend," she said. "The girl is unhappy; she has need of peace. Perhaps Armand, and the little farm at Tours, would have been best." They looked at each other and smiled; then, somewhat to his surprise, she kissed him. This gratuitous mark of affection inspired him to tease her.

"You are not willing to relinquish Pierre," he said.

"Nor you the little farm at Tours." She had him there; he sighed and polished his spectacles before resuming work.

The subject had all at once grown depressing; it was never re-opened between them. He completed the miniature according to Gerald's instructions, taking great care to reproduce the pearls to perfection and to alter slightly the expression of the eyes, as his patron had commanded. The generous sum



which he had received for the work was put aside as a marriage portion for his eldest daughter; the picture itself he habitually carried in his breast pocket, to be the more easily forthcoming, as he told himself, upon the Englishman's arrival to claim it. It passed out of existence at the moment of his own death, in the singular manner before related; it was without doubt his masterpiece.

The next morning, as Jennifer passed through the courtyard of the hotel on her way to the luxurious chaise which awaited them in the street, she was aware of a neatly-dressed man-servant bearing a large hamper from which ascended in the chill November air a miraculous scent of roses; she assured herself that the hamper could contain nothing more enthralling to the imagination than the fine linen of a dandy laundered with perfumed soap, yet when Gerald strode to the basket and raised its lid with a supercilious sniff, her heart beat against her ribs like a wild-cat kitten in a cage of silk.

"White roses—at this time of year!" he cried with polite fury. "I congratulate you, my love, on having made a conquest; your admirer must be either a millionaire or a gardener; he must have posted straight from Naples or robbed the conservatory of our own ambassador, which I noticed as being well-furnished with like blooms; in either case he must be a man of courage and determination; I should like to meet him."


His laugh was frigid; he plunged his long hands into the tangle of pearl-coloured flowers and fresh green leaves; Jennifer's heart stood still. She expected every instant to see a great crystal flacon of *Eau du Roi* flourished against the sun; the vision

appeared to her mind as alarming as the appearance of a phial of arsenic would have been, and when the basket finally gaped empty upon the frosted cobble-stones of the courtyard, with the flowers scattered like a snow-drift beside it, she felt indeed that a miracle had been performed, an Ovidian metamorphosis achieved; she came very near to believing that the bright-eyed youth himself had assumed the finer substance of a heap of rose-leaves.

When her husband stepped with great deliberation up to this heap, and with the utmost composure proceeded to stamp it into shreds, she screamed three times and fainted. Sallie revived this swoon to semi-consciousness by the simple expedient of shaking the moisture from such flowers as had escaped her master's boot-heels into the face of her mistress; Jennifer was carried to the chaise almost completely covered with white petals and drops of dew. Gerald asked her no question; he seemed to consider the incident closed, as indeed it was in reality.

The youth, finding his nymph had departed, remembered her with despairing rage for fully six months, at the end of which time he married at the earnest wish of his mother and lived happily ever after; Jennifer never entirely forgot him, though her curious experience with M. Saint Amond in Calcutta relegated the English boy to the limbo of half-remembered and wholly unintelligible dreams.

## 6. THE RAJAH'S RUBY

ERALD and his wife spent a night in London after all; Dick was overjoyed to see them, and took them to the *Ombres Chinois*, undoubtedly the most elegant performance then to be witnessed in town. Lady Dicker would have preferred a table of four-handed whist, but Gerald pointed out with the most perfect courtesy and firmness that Jennifer was in no fit state to play an intelligent game of cards after the acute misery which she had experienced in crossing the Channel. His cousin's kind heart was touched; she gave in with an excellent grace, and enjoyed the evening without a single regret for her favourite amusement; she allowed Jennifer's nodding head to rest against her dumpy little shoulder more than once in the course of the entertainment.

Gerald eyed his wife solicitously several times, but he was convinced that a sea voyage was precisely the tonic which her evident fatigue required. Their box was somewhat withdrawn from prying glances; its velvet curtains afforded a consoling shade in the midst of swaying lights and clamorous gongs; Jennifer was fortunate to be able to sleep during the greater part of the bizarre and brilliant spectacle which was so obviously delighting the remainder of the audience.

After posting through a snow-storm to Gravesend

the next day, Gerald and his wife dined at the Falcon Inn and went immediately aboard the Phoenix East Indiaman. Jennifer was delighted with her cabin, which was neatness itself, and most elegantly fitted up, being painted a light sky blue with gold beadings; the bed and curtains were of the richest Madras chintz, and a capital mahogany dressing table and bureau completed the furnishings. Her inspection of the entire ship was less reassuring, though productive among the ship's crew of an instant and surprising predilection for her which would have caused any one of them to relinquish without a murmur his share of rum and plum-duff had she ever felt inclined to demand this sacrifice.

She could hardly, however, have realised her extraordinary popularity among the seamen; and certainly any such manifestation on their part would have distressed her beyond words; during the two weeks in which she lay supine under the swinging curtains of her berth she was frequently inconvenienced by the strong scent of tobacco which the fresh breeze conveyed through the porthole of the cabin. She could not know that this was the result of a devotion which forced many a sleepy sailor to forego his well-earned hours of rest in order to keep romantic watch near the couch of his divinity; the fact that such a proceeding was ill judged cannot detract from its simple nobility.

Nothing could rouse her; the prodigious seas of the Bay of Biscay merely toyed with her inanimate form as if she had been a very small mouse in the power of a playful but gargantuan cat. Fortunately the wind, though tempestuous, was uniformly fair; the ship's progress was consequently extremely

rapid; within twelve days they were approaching the Canaries. One bright evening Gerald entered her cabin door; he was feeling particularly fit after a dinner of boiled fowl and claret and a few games of pagoda whist with a group of gentlemen returning to India to resume their duties in the armies of Madras or Bengal or the no less arduous Civil Service.

"My love," he said firmly, "I am going to carry you up onto the deck; the air will do what medical attention has failed to accomplish, and you will have the pleasure of beholding the truly glorious spectacle of sunset upon the peak of Teneriffe."

The prescription, though Spartan, was efficacious; the snowy eminence scarce stood more quietly among the clouds than its reflection lay upon the waters. The natural beauties of the island, combined with a spoonful of port wine jelly, went far towards reviving Jennifer to a faint interest in the affairs of the world, and as day by day her loveliness was augmented by a sea-shell colour in her cheeks and a long succession of becoming bonnets, the sailors' admiration grew apace, and they strove constantly to excel each other in feats of strength and skill, which, if they did not at all attract her notice, at least caused a noticeable improvement in their manner of hauling upon ropes and holystoning decks.

On approaching the Cape of Good Hope, where the captain had given them all lively expectations of stopping, they were attended by so fair and favourable a breeze that this worthy man immediately informed them of the advisability of rounding the giant promontory as speedily as might be, very sensibly observing that a month gained in the pas-



sage to India was of far more importance than eating grapes at the Cape town. Putting into Johanna for a fresh supply of water and provisions, he was soon able to mitigate their disappointment by permitting them to enjoy a considerable purchase of the excellent pineapples, oranges and guavas of that luxuriant island.

Poultry and fish appeared again upon the table, transformed by Mohammed into the most savoury curries and kedgerees; a personal friend of Lord Clive's was the lucky possessor of a Caffree servant who had been taught to dress turtle in the West Indies, and who had cost his master upwards of fifty guineas in Jamaica; Gerald's cases of foreign wines and liqueurs, obtained at an Italian warehouse in the Haymarket during his last hurried hours in London, contributed much towards the general good-fellowship, and it needed only the very high stakes at hazard prevailing among the gentlemen to make Jennifer comfortably aware that her husband was well pleased with the conditions of the voyage. She was the only lady on board, and as such was the recipient of a prodigious quantity of oranges and guavas and an even more generous supply of compliments, carefully kept in check by Gerald, who spent almost every afternoon at her side reading aloud from the French philosophers, and insisted upon her retiring every evening at an early hour in order to preserve her health; a Supreme Councillor returning to Bengal once had the audacity to send a glass of champagne and a magnificent pineapple to her cabin, with his respectful queries as to her welfare; only this personage's obvious senility prevented Gerald from giving him a glance over the



card-table which would have curdled his blood forever against the most torrid suns of India.

Upon another occasion a comely youth, going out to his initial service in the Madras army, happened to observe, through the open door of Mr. Poynyard's cabin, a tableau consisting of that gentleman, a beautiful fusee, and a pair of pistols of exquisite workmanship, which their owner was engaged in cleaning with the most meticulous attention; the youth had spent the greater part of the preceding night in pacing the deck and composing a poem, after the manner of a Greek ode, to celebrate the glad New Year and the remarkable beauty of Lady Jennifer Poynyard. It may have been merely the vivid imagination of one whose mind was already infused with poetic fancies, but the Cadet could have sworn that a sudden and terrifying look, swifter and more deadly than a basilisk's, darted from Gerald's steely eyes into the innocent blue of his own; he at once bethought him of his fond parents' farewell admonitions and the sage advice of his kind old friend the vicar, and reached the decision, after regaining the privacy of his favourite corner of the deck, that the poem was rather too impassioned in tone to render it a suitable offering to a married woman.

He ended by presenting Jennifer with the sewing-case which had been his mother's parting gift, and locking the ode away in the respectable privacy of his writing-desk, thus solving the whole matter in an eminently satisfactory way; the sewing-case had long been the subject of many unfilial maledictions, owing to the presence within its inoffensive cover of a number of painfully sharp pins and needles;

the ode he often found invaluable during the course of his subsequent prolonged career as the handsomest subaltern in the Company's two armies.

If Gerald read *Candide* upon this particular voyage, he did not share his enjoyment of it with Jennifer; perhaps he thought that the pessimistic conclusions of that romance might produce a disheartening effect upon his wife's tender and malleable understanding. Nevertheless, it must not for an instant be supposed that Jennifer was excluded from her husband's intellectual interests; the Encyclopædists, if sometimes irrelevant to his personal tastes, could not fail to engage his active mind, which anything of a controversial nature invariably intrigued.

His wife always preferred Diderot to Voltaire, owing to the fact that the last volume of his great work, the one containing the plates and comprising a marvellous selection of steel-engravings of all the wonders of the universe, had but just reached them during their stay in Paris; this edifying and instructive book was her comfort and stay on many a long azure afternoon when Gerald denied her the relaxations of Mrs. Elizabeth Griffith and Mrs. Frances Brooke, whose novels he did not consider worthy of her attention even on a sea-voyage. The *Pensées Philosophiques* she could never sincerely enjoy; it seemed curious that it should require so much time for reading; Gerald himself had informed her that M. Diderot wrote it between the morning of Good Friday and the evening of Easter Monday, which appeared a short period for the putting together of so many words, if a somewhat rigorous and Lenten manner in which to pass the happy fes-

tival of Easter; the penance should have stopped by Saturday. The volume of plates, in her estimation, never ceased to be Diderot's supreme achievement.

They reached the mouth of the Bay of Bengal early in January; it being then too late in the season for them to venture upon the coast of Coromandel, having an admirable good run for seven days, and then making the land; the captain entered this in the log-book as the Island of Cheduba, but Gerald stated, with the most complete assurance, that it was more probably the mainland of Aracan. They cleared the coast, and stood to the westward for the purpose of making Point Palmiras. Gerald was proved to be, as usual, correct in his supposition; the captain's remark that it was a pity Mr. P. hadn't the job of navigating the vessel himself loses the force of sarcasm when it is taken into consideration that Gerald could almost undoubtedly have acquitted himself in a manner to make the assertion no more than simple truth.

At the end of another week a light breeze from the southwest carried them into Balasore Roads; they anchored off the Island of Sangor on the nineteenth of January, 1773. In London upon this very same day Junius was writing his farewell letter to Woodfall; in less than a year from that time Philip Francis was on his way to Bengal. At the identical moment of Gerald's arrival in that province the Governor of Bengal was in the act of dining, noon being the customary dinner hour in that part of the world; his good digestion and peace of mind were no more disturbed by the projected journey of Junius than by the proximity of his young friend Gerald.

The knowledge that he was upon the eve of becoming the first titular Governor-General of India, on the retirement of Mr. Cartier, was his first absorption at that instant; next in interest the plans for his country house at Alipur; lastly he was seriously considering the advisability of sending his secretary in search of his body servant and bidding the latter tell the cook to overcome the habit of mixing so large a quantity of turmeric, chilies, ginger, coriander, aniseed, black cummin and cardemon in the simple sauces he had expressly ordered for his curries; he was a man of plain taste and spare diet, and could never quite understand Gerald's minute attention to gastronomic affairs. He was no more gratified by the thought of friends than vexed by the suspicion of foes; such are the curiosities of history, of which this tale is too trivial in essence to render much account.

Gerald immediately engaged a paunceway, or Bengalese boat, to convey his small party to Calcutta; the novelty of this mode of travelling went far towards reconciling his young wife to the extreme discomfort of the trip; the motion was inconsiderable. On the evening of the second day the voyagers came within sight of that magnificent suburb known as Garden Reach; here numbers of gentlemen of the highest rank in the Company's service had erected luxurious villas for occupancy during the hot weather; a few of these houses were utilised by their owners the year round as a means of escaping the unhealthful airs of the city. Gerald could not forbear remarking somewhat censoriously upon the spread of pomp and splendour in the vicinity of Calcutta; his own palace, which enjoyed a

noble prospect of Garden Reach in one direction, and of the recently-completed Fort William in the other, with the great town as a fitting background for the fortifications, was now slightly dwarfed by one or two of the newer residences of Justices and Councillors. He had, however, the satisfaction of knowing that in point of elegance and beauty his own excelled all the other mansions, in addition to commanding incomparably the most extended view of wide waters and verdurous landscape, so refreshing to the eye amid the burning climate of Bengal.

This miniature palace was originally, as has been stated, the property of a native merchant, a man of opulence and a friend of the celebrated Gocal Gosaul; Gerald was always inclined to give credence to the rumour that the plans for its construction had been supervised by a pupil of the mysterious M. Austin de Bordeaux of Agra; the story alone seemed to account for an extreme delicacy of design, contrasting strongly with the solid brick and masonry of the neighbouring buildings, which wore the tawdry detail of their stucco ornaments with an air of ostentation which could not blind the discerning glance to their innate vulgarity.

Jennifer was charmed by the exotic richness and exquisite purity of style and workmanship prevailing throughout her new home; the mosaics of *pietra dura*, the pierced complexities of snowy marble, filled her with childish appreciation and delight; she kissed Gerald at least twenty times before exhausting herself and her vocabulary in ecstatic survey of the fairy castle. The indigo hangings and silver arabesques of the principal drawing-rooms especially



pleased her; their subtle fragrance of sandal-wood, aloes, musk, cassia, and sweet calamus, persisting among the rich folds long after the brazen perfume-jars and incense burners of their vanished mistress had been broken and cast into the dust-bin, intoxicated her to a pitch of laughter almost impossible to one of her temperament; she fell asleep at last singing Scottish melodies of an inconceivable sadness in a little voice by no means devoid of merriment, to the vast disappointment of Sallie, who was accustomed to brushing Jennifer's bright locks every night while her kind lady read aloud, for the benefit of both, from the fascinating pages of Samuel Richardson.

The girl found the romance of Clarissa so enthralling that she not infrequently bedewed her mistress's glittering red-gold curls with showers of tears of sincerest sympathy for the sorrows of that lovely and unfortunate heroine. Upon this occasion, she was forced instead to listen to a recital of Border Ballads, winding up with a very spirited version of Kinmont Willie and a somewhat frivolous rendering of the Bonnie Earl of Moray; as a native of Devonshire she declared before God that the words were so much Dutch to her, while the un-Christian dolefulness of the tunes reminded her of the Methodists. She drew the gauzy azure curtains of Jennifer's gilded bed to the accompaniment of a queer minor caroling.

"Werena my heart licht I wad dee!" sang Jennifer; Sallie minced out of the room sniffing an atmosphere of heathen perfume and unholy music which set her refined Church of England teeth on edge.



"There was always a touch of Chapel about the Earl," she reflected sagely, remembering the minister at Carterhaugh and the porridge of a cold October morning. Lady Tam-Linn had ever been her ideal of fine ladyhood; she was devotedly attached to Jennifer, but she often pitied the strange little soul because she wasn't pure Cleverly-Neville undiluted by that wild and lonely blood of the Lorns.

Meanwhile Gerald, after surrounding himself with a sufficient number of writing-desks, newly-mended pens, silver candlesticks, bronze and crystal paper-weights, enamelled snuff-boxes, travelling-clocks of tooled Italian leather and Swiss workmanship, and ancient and modern books in vellum and morocco, to cause him to feel comfortably at home in his sumptuous library, was engaged in composing a letter to the Governor of Bengal; it was a model of respectful modesty and masterly tact.

"I have selected him for success," he said inwardly, smiling a trifle at the perfect phrasing of his literary effort, in which he had contrived to combine the demure and graceful wit of the period with an ageless force of expression all his own. "He will climb far enough for me to take a flying spring from his shoulders which shall assure me of landing as high as a wise man should ever care to be above his fellows. I had rather, any day, take the chance of utilising a top-heavy genius for a ladder than seek a safe footing on the flaccid lumps of humanity who have lacked strength even to stand erect; my ladder may fall, but I shall feel it swaying, and, thanks to the athletic lightness of my frame and the activity of my senses, I shall save myself in time.

Meanwhile, it is more profitable to the mind and soul of a gentleman to owe promotion to a genius than to accept favours from swine."

Having neatly folded this important letter, he sealed it with peculiar care, employing the best quality of sealing-wax and an amethyst signet-ring; he seldom had recourse to the common wafer, and his letters were always delivered by hand unless they must traverse great distances; in the latter case they were invariably franked by men of rank and great political and social distinction. Waking Mohammed, who was slumbering outside the door in the happy dream of a returned exile for whom the bazaars would be open on the morrow, Gerald gave him clear and concise instructions for the note's forwarding during the next forenoon, and after swallowing a mild chincona febrifuge as a precautionary measure, retired to a well-earned and invigorating rest.

"There at least is something accomplished," he told himself, as he snuffed the last candle. "It may be no more than a first step, but I feel infinitely relieved to know that it has been taken." It is quite possible that the sound of Jennifer's voice had penetrated to the library and made some unconscious impression on a mind occupied with affairs of state to the exclusion of all other interests; it is certain, at least, that he climbed into bed softly humming a minuet of Lulli's; his whole being was pervaded by a sense of quiet but enormous satisfaction.

A succession of large and formal dinners followed the arrival of the married pair among the scenes of Gerald's early triumphs; every one spoke of him as a coming man, and his allegiance to Hastings seemed

never sufficiently well-defined to make the Governor's secret enemies feel safe in alienating him, he might prove useful after all, at a pinch; he had brains of a very uncommon sort, and in spite of his breeding it might not be wise to bank too confidently on his incorruptible character. His wife's beauty and his own distinction caused them to be much in demand as guests; his whole establishment was conducted upon a scale of a well-nigh fabulous splendour; his entertainments were extravagantly brilliant; dazzling lights, exquisite harmonies of flute and clarinet, choice viands and a variety of rarest wines turned a mere dinner-table into a vision of Paradise. He kept three handsome phaëtons and three pairs of beautiful carriage horses; his saddle-horses were of the noblest Arabian breed; the little equipage of fine wicker which he caused to be fashioned expressly for the purpose of affording the cream-coloured ponies a chance to draw Jennifer behind them in proper style was soon one of the sights of the evening's drive to the race-course; the fact that she was romantic enough to prefer a palanquin gave Calcutta less opportunity than it would have liked to observe her in her Parisian clothes with the blue silk reins between her little fingers; the scarlet whip she never saw the necessity of using, since the ponies were now quite old and completely reliable.

The fancy for the palanquin was of course utterly unreasonable, but Gerald with his customary generosity gave way to it; it was richly fitted out in every particular, and only the bearers' distressing habit of uttering groans of a profound and awful character caused Jennifer anything but the utmost

pleasure in its use. Owing to her extreme fragility and slenderness she was totally at a loss to account for this practice until her husband informed her that such was the invariable way of palanquin bearers from time immemorial, and that had the conveyance been entirely empty they would have conducted themselves in precisely the same manner.

Among the Burra Sahibs of Calcutta Gerald was now incomparably the most magnificent in his mode of living; the reflection that as yet he held no other official position than his original one of Writer to the Company would now have appeared ludicrous had it been present in any mind but his own. For his part, he was well content to wait, winning the approbation of his chosen chief by a series of secret intrigues and manœuvres truly astonishing in their subtlety, and enjoying meanwhile the possession of the wife of his express selection and the manner of living which he was still young enough to consider amusing in spite of a clear realisation that it could not fail to weary him after the lapse of years.

In contrast to his sumptuous surroundings, and to the very delicate and fantastic beauty of his wife's apparel, Gerald now affected a dress of elegant severity; he wore his hair unpowdered, and his clothes were of so quiet a colour and so austere a cut that even Mohammed, remembering the Prophet's injunction, could hardly fail to approve. The valet was submerged in the Mussulman, and he took considerable pleasure in quoting to Sallie such proverbs as "It is lawful for woman to clothe herself in silken garments, but it is forbidden to man; any man who shall wear silk in this world shall not wear it in the next."

On another occasion, when his master insisted upon donning, for the sake of coolness, a pair of skilfully woven Lisle hose with embroidered clocks which he had purchased along with many other articles of the finest cotton and linen materials and the best grades of Nankeen in Blunt's Warehouse in the Haymarket, Mohammed had the satisfaction of silencing Sallie with the well-known saying "God will not be merciful to him who through vanity wears silk stockings." A French valet would probably have sulked; among the faithful a deeper wisdom prevails, and to the good servant Mohammed Gerald never appeared to greater advantage than in the cold simplicity of his flaxen queue and the grey or fawnish cloth of his superbly-fitting coats and breeches, in decorous contrast to the prevailing tendency among the youthful members of society to cover themselves like marionettes or monkeys with a profusion of lace, spangles, and foil.

His refusal to smoke a hookah was another proof of his independence of mind among a group of rattling and flighty gentlemen to whom this habit, begun as a fashionable diversion, had soon assumed the importance of an indispensable necessity of existence. He seldom condescended to attend gatherings at the Harmonic Tavern and similar places of entertainment; his tastes in wine and music were almost captious in their perfection; his domestic life was always beyond reproach.

Jennifer also was bidden to remove the powder from her flame-coloured tresses; their revelation created a sensation in Calcutta and gave her a new interest in the innumerable frocks of white material, ranging in hue from pearl to thickest cream, with



which Paris had provided her; she knew at once that the effect was far more striking with gold instead of silver locks; divergence rather than concord between costume and coiffure struck the high note which her simple vanity approved and her proud husband demanded.

Gerald was invariably correct in these little ideas, and had a well-nigh uncanny gift of discerning the latest mode before it was fully hatched; in this as in other and more important matters the thin egg-shell of the future was transparent to his pale and rapacious eye. Though it was utterly impossible that he could have informed himself as to the question until many months later, this was the precise date at which the united peruke makers of London were petitioning His Majesty the King to pass a statute whereby it should be unlawful for a man to wear his own hair; the trend of fashion was turning slowly but inevitably away from powder, pomatum and the six-tiered wig of the macaroni; it would soon be extremely *demodé* to be bald, and young ladies with an abundance of chestnut curls could presently have the joy of exhibiting these natural adornments almost anywhere except at Court.

Jennifer lived more than ever in a dream of lights and perfumes and unreal sounds; the routs and concerts of the evening were hardly more exotic and singular to her senses than the ordinary glare and noise and clatter of the Indian every-day running beside her palanquin as she passed. The air smelt like the chapel at Parthemont set in the walled garden at home upon the hottest day of summer; it stifled her shallow lungs, and she was rejoiced when the rough northwesterners of March and April



beat the flimsy verdure of Garden Reach into a tangle that matted the ground with green and fell in torn ribbons along her window sills.

The hot season she could never for an instant have supported; regarding all extremities of heat and cold with an equal repugnance, she had never scrupled to faint in church upon a sultry Sunday in August if the family's departure for Carterhaugh was postponed by any mischance; her habit of contracting a severe sore throat when the Scotch autumn stiffened into winter was too generally recognised among her relations to render it a measure to which she was often compelled to resort. It must not for a moment be supposed that she practised the slightest degree of dissimulation at these times; she simply utilised to its fullest extent the natural delicacy of her constitution and the affection which her appearance immediately wakened in all beholders to obtain certain attentions and privileges which she had neither the strength nor the courage to gain by bolder methods; her ethical right to these pathetic stratagems seems fairly well established.

Upon the advice of the celebrated Laird brothers, the foremost physicians in Calcutta, Gerald determined about the middle of April to allow his wife to accompany him upon one or two of the secret missions and amazing enterprises with the execution of which his leader continued to honour him. He was entirely whole-hearted in his devotion to the cause of Hastings; that great man, on the other hand, had the good sense to trust his associate and the good nature to give him a very free rein in certain matters more important to Gerald himself than to the Governor-General of India. No one knew

better that the astute Mr. Poynyard than his chief's position was precarious; he knew to a day when the new Council proposed sailing, and he weighed the enmity of Francis against the allegiance of Barwell with his usual cool and cynical clarity of vision. When all was said and done, he felt convinced that, in the words of the Eastern poet, the enemies of the Governor-General might chance to find a tiger while beating the jungle for a deer. Nevertheless, he saw no reason to parade his considered and decided loyalty, such an exhibition were at once injudicious and in the highest degree vulgar; its omission left Hastings no less obliged and his adversaries the more hopelessly baffled.

He declined all promotion for the present; upon the Company's books he still figured as a mere Commercial Resident, but few Members of Council would have grumbled at changing places with him. Only the appalling number and dangerous nature of the diplomatic missions upon which he was sent prevented their admiring envy from becoming rancorous and unkind; he might be saving money for himself, but he was indisputably saving the skins of a number of worthy Anglo-Indians at the same time. These seasoned men of affairs were far too skilled in worldly matters to be unaware of this circumstance; the quality of his entertainments and the beauty of his wife completed the conquest of their better natures.

Whether Gerald had any hand in the transaction whereby the Nawab Wazir of Oudh became sole proprietor of that province at the small cost of contributing half a million sterling towards the expenses of that war which resulted in the massacre of Patna

and Major Munro's efficient discouragement of the first Sepoy Mutiny is a matter for conjecture. These sanguinary events occurred before his earliest appearance in India; the dealings with the Wazir marked not only Gerald's own arrival in Calcutta, but also the beginning of Baron Clive of Plassey's second administration as Governor of Bengal.

Lord Clive has certainly received at the hands of History a larger share of praise and blame for the affair than was ever accorded Gerald, but it is impossible to tell into what royal peacock pies of diplomacy the latter's long forefinger was not gently introduced. It is probable that his extended and cordial friendship with the Wazir himself, certainly dating from '65, had its origin in some such kindly act on the part of Gerald; it was now a sincere pleasure to him to renew this friendship.

Scarcely less delightful was his frequently postponed visit to the court at Murshidad, where years before he had obtained the remarkable pearls now adorning Jennifer's gracile throat. Having persuaded the higher powers of the real necessity for this mission, he undoubtedly succeeded in changing the sentiments of the rajah from vexed and helpless discontent to lively gratitude and appreciation; he gave the monarch a much clearer notion, not only of the generosity of the British in allowing him a handsome sum in annual exchange for his power, but also of their genius as a military nation, and of the important advantages to be derived from cordial relations between native princes and English gentlemen. The unyielding yet tactful force of his arguments left the rajah pluming himself upon his wealth and his desirable allies instead of toying pettishly

with dancing girls and dreams of revolt; Gerald went home with a magnificent ruby in his pocket.

Oddly enough, he felt its presence there rather an embarrassment than otherwise; he could not by any stretch of the imagination picture it adorning his own person; for Jennifer the colour was inconceivable and the size unsuited in the extreme. Conjured from æther and diaphanous fire as she so miraculously appeared, her flesh was too light a framework for the thick splendours of the majority of jewels; their tints of life and living things seemed carnal in direct comparison with the angelic amalgams of her body. Gerald understood this; the star sapphire which was to have been his wedding gift to her shone like a planetary sphere in its ivory box; invisibly suspended from her little neck its solidarity was like a bruise marring the superfine tissue of her skin. He accepted the disappointment with a philosophy that matched her own indifference; he turned the tiny key in the carven lock, and because it was a charming plaything in its own right, wore it on his watch chain for seven years, at the end of which time he found a use for the star-sapphire with which our narrative has no concern.

If a blue jewel was a bruise against Jennifer's flesh, an emerald was an asp, and a ruby a veritable death-blow. When Gerald adjured her to wear nothing less ethereal than air-clear diamond or inward-lighted pearl, she did not consider this command a severe deprivation; her twenty trinket-boxes were already overflowing with an abundance of such treasures, augmented daily by her husband's thoughtfulness and the admiring regard of almost every crowned head in India; it was said that the chief

of the Rohillas himself sent a fair-skinned Caucasian free-booter into the streets of Garden Reach, with a flag of truce, a letter for Gerald written in a Hindustani cipher which he alone of living Englishmen could read, and for Jennifer a necklace of yellow diamonds fashioned in those golden days when Afghan princes ruled in the valleys of Rohilcund.

Though this strange embassy could not avert the subsequent slaughter of the brave Rohillas by Colonel Champion's brigade, it is certain that Gerald tried his best, when the question arose, to prevent this most unfortunate occurrence. He always encouraged Jennifer to wear the necklace; the curious colour of the diamonds matched the lightning flashes in her eyes.

As for the rajah's ruby, Gerald never found the woman to whom he could offer this noble gem; his æsthetic sense always held him back at the last minute because he felt sure that the result would be incongruous. At one time he cherished a vague notion of presenting it to Pauline Bonaparte; the shocking effects of the West Indian climate upon her health and the clarity of her smooth olive complexion made his non-pursuance of this plan a life-long source of mental satisfaction.

At last, in his old age, he beheld the indubitable face gliding like a pensive Muse through the distressing confusion of the carnival at Venice; the brows, the smoothly-banded, burnished darkness of the hair, the very laurel wreath, proclaimed the exact Melpomene, drawn down to human sadness by a shabby black domino. The girl was obviously poor; the gift of the ruby would have assured her a permanent affluence, but Gerald realised that he would cheer-




fully support a husband and several young children or a brace of lovers rather than forego the pleasure of seeing the great stone hanging like a mortal drop of blood upon her breast. He followed her with the long dignified stride from which the years had purloined nothing but speed; in her quick step the goddess was revealed, and she left him far behind.

Had he been able to subdue his natural sense of importance to the level of a little hurry this pretty idyll might have had another ending; its true consummation was no more than an old man preserving a lovely girl's virtue and his own majestic vanity at one and the same moment. He went home, looking, among that noisy crew, like a captive Roman emperor in the hands of the barbarians; he felt curiously thwarted and weary. The happy ignorance in which the fair Venetian returned to her father's shop was never disturbed by the remotest suspicion of this equivocal aversion of Fortune's countenance from her humble and contented lot.





## 7. THE GRADUAL DUSKY VEIL

ERALD returned to Calcutta after the last of these interesting diplomatic enterprises so stimulated and amused by his adventures that he felt more than ever convinced of the benefit to his wife's health to be derived from a like pleasure trip in his company. Her medical men at first protested against the fatigue of such an undertaking, but Gerald honestly persuaded them during the course of a simple dinner, of the advisability of his plan; his triumph must be attributed almost entirely to his eloquence and urbanity, for neither of the Lairds allowed himself more than the very moderate portion of whiskey necessary to render the drinking-water wholesome and agreeable.

"She shall have every luxury," Gerald assured them, "and what is harder come by in this infernal country, every comfort to boot. She shall have a dozen or more palanquin and a regiment of bearers; she shall have cool wines and dainty food and skillfully concocted febrifuges, wherein the taste of the chincona bark is concealed among a multiplicity of flavourous spices, and the saps of trees join with delicious fruit juices to relieve the thirst of mid-day. She shall have a tent to sleep in damasked with more fairy nightmares than filled the head of Scheherazade, and she shall ride one day on a great granite tower of elephant flesh and the next on a

milk-white doe, according to her fancy and the exigencies of the weather."

James Laird cocked his eyebrows at this; he cut a careful slice of pineapple and looked interrogatively at John. John's nod was at once an affirmative reply to his brother's question and a complete agreement with Gerald's ideas.

"She will have, in addition to all these things, a devoted and attentive husband," he said with a low bow which suggested the courtier and seemed at variance with his grim Scots voice.

At this time, in spite of the somewhat apocryphal legends which in Europe clustered about Cagliostro's name, little or nothing was known of the mesmeric art; an intelligent observer might have deduced many valuable facts as to the useful and practical nature of this science from the words and actions of the two distinguished brothers during the remainder of the afternoon and evening; Gerald's fee was generosity itself, but they both felt that their host's warm heart and delightful manners were better than many golden guineas.

The next morning Gerald himself drew the blue curtains of his wife's couch with one hand, while with the other he carefully deposited her breakfast-tray upon the little knees drawn up under the thin linen sheets for its reception.

"Do me the favour to eat your *chota hazri* for once, my dear child; as it includes nothing but a cup of tea and a mangosteen the task should not be too cruel; even a sprite should subsist with pleasure upon infusions of flowers and rosy-ripe apples of Eden. . . . And now, I have some excellent good news for you; we are to leave this dull and malarial

spot to-morrow for the express purpose of visiting your relatives at Delhi."

Jennifer was totally at a loss to understand him; she blinked sleepily at the close-shaven lines about his lips and saw that he was smiling amiably down upon her from his commanding height; he appeared very proud and handsome in his pale-grey coat.

She felt a sudden access of anxiety, accompanied by a vivid but incorrect premonition that a fleet of East Indiamen had arrived at the entirely problematical Port of Delhi with scores of her most unsympathetic aunts and cousins turning the decks into *parterres* of parasols and Sunday bonnets, set in a formal pattern. The thought troubled her; she was convinced that Gerald could not possibly tolerate her kinsfolk; many of the Lorns were opinionated without being witty, while all the Cleverlys were silly without being silent.

She stared at her husband in alarm; her golden-hazel eyes were black with apprehension; she seemed a newly-wakened Naiad with the deep-sea light of her darkened room falling about her from the bluish green jalousies at the windows and the indigo curtains above her head.

"Explain, Gerald, please explain; I am afraid you are teasing me," she murmured feebly, sipping her tea with a shivery sense of comfort in its heat and fragrance. Gerald noticed the minute convulsion of her shoulders under the lace and lawn of her night-gown; in a moment he was all gallant anxiety and solicitude.

"Ah, I was determined upon a change of air for you; I knew that you could not long survive this climate even under the most favourable conditions;

thank God we have acted in time; you are upon the point of contracting a fever, you are at this very instant the victim of a slight chill. A morsel of this preparation of chincona will cure you at once; a spoonful of ginger conserve will immediately remove the taste of the medicine. Nevertheless, such simple remedies cannot long hope to preserve life in one of your transcendentalised substance; you must not be subjected to the pestilential miasmas of Calcutta during the coming season. We leave at dawn to-morrow; I am engaged to dine with three Members of Council; I have invited a few of our close friends to assemble here for tea and coffee and more convivial farewells at seven this evening; I affectionately direct you to wear your pearls and your silver tamboured gauze and to look your loveliest for me; the music and dancing will not commence before eleven, so no fatigue beyond quietly agreeable conversation is incumbent upon you; the requisite beauty you achieve without effort. Take only chicken broth for dinner, with a little rice; I deeply regret the necessity of your dining alone, but the rest will do you good; be sure to drink a glass of champagne and to follow it *instantly* with another of these pellets."

He stooped swiftly and kissed her; the next minute his grey coat-tails had whisked into the hot sunlight of the small anteroom where Sallie sat mending one of her mistress's silk mantles; his few words were sufficient to send the girl into hysterics and then out of them again into awed silence.

"Sallie," said Jennifer humbly, "if you will only be quiet and not cry I will give you my turquoise locket; I had a little rather that you did not pray

either, aloud; I think it might be a very good thing for both of us if we prayed in our souls. Ask Mohammed to help you with the boxes; your master will not be home before six o'clock; Mohammed is a good kind creature, and you must overcome your dislike for his complexion, which is surely no more than a healthy coat of tan. I feel absolutely certain that he would defend us faithfully and with his life against any dangers which might attend our journey. Pray give me the books on my dressing-table, and raise the blind perhaps three inches. Thank you; I shall not need you again this morning."

"Oh, my dear Miss Jenny—I should say Madam, as more respectful—but is it tigers or savages that you have in mind?" cried the unhappy girl, wringing her hands while her voice again ascended in an increasing wail to heaven.

Jennifer held out her breakfast tray with a gesture of appeal; this occupied the wildly fluttering pink hands which were causing her such inward disquiet; her next words sent an increased colour into Sallie's plump cheeks, from which fear had removed the Devonshire roses, leaving a strange skim-milkiness in their stead.

"My girl," said Jennifer in a very small voice, but with profound dignity, made the more striking by the fact that she lay helplessly recumbent in a royal bed several sizes too large for her narrow limbs and the sorrowful ivory oval of her face, "my good girl, I am forced to speak with a severity which distresses me; you must positively manage to control yourself at once; hysteria can serve no useful purpose in the terrible situation in which we find



ourselves at this moment. Prayer—silent prayer, you understand—I strongly recommend; industry never comes amiss to a disturbed spirit. You must pack the boxes directly; if you feel the absolute necessity of crying I must beg you to go down into the kitchen; I forbid you to scream within the limits of the garden. I am sorry to issue such rigorous commands, but I must at all costs compose myself; it is my first duty to my husband. Oh, my dear Sallie, I am indeed heartbroken to have to scold you; I have never before spoken to you so sternly; these are hard words, I am aware.”

She lifted her large eyes to ascertain for herself the effect that such unwonted harshness had produced; they were swimming in tears that spilled over and hung like diamond pear-drops among her curls. Sallie’s round blue eyes were also wet; she fell down on her knees beside her mistress’s bed, moving silently and with great gentleness for all her impetuous and lively strength of body. She took Jennifer in her arms and kissed her; her soft West country voice was another caress. “I’ll do as you say, ma’am; I’ll be good,” she said with the docility of an affectionate child.

“We must strive for unshaken fortitude under misfortune . . .” Jennifer began bravely, and then subsided into quiet despair against Sallie’s pink calico bosom. They clung together like sisters, and now the stronger one consoled the weaker.

“I’ll take care of you, Miss Jenny; never fear; it’s cruel to carry a poor lamb like you into this Babylonian wilderness, but I shan’t let a single savage and ravening beast come nigh you; no, not if I have to fight them like the Christian martyrs in



the pictures, and they in their night-gowns with their hair down their backs being suddenly aroused, I dare say, by their cruel persecutors, which by their faces I should judge to be foreigners and natives. But, oh, please leave off saying those dreadful long words, just like the master, which always make my blood run cold and will wear you to a frazzle speaking them with a tiny little mouth such as yours which was never meant for anything sourer than strawberries and pretty songs and other sweet things which perhaps I shouldn't mention. Now cry if you've a mind to, and a nice clean apron's better any day than a lace pocket handkerchief, so here's mine, still smelling lovely of the lavender which Mrs. Mattock gave me the day I left home all sewed up in beautiful cheesecloth bags as neat as neat."

If Sallie's spirited harangue was somewhat lacking in tact, the missing quality was amply atoned for by the exceeding kindness of her words; Jennifer kissed her with a gratitude which might have been considered unbecoming, in the eyes of the conventional observer, in one of her superior station; luckily the two girls were alone save for the presence of a small flame-coloured macaw in a silver cage; his judgment of their conduct was presumably lenient, as he was deeply attached to them both, and would perch upon the shoulder of either, eating sugar from her lips without a thought of the difference in social position between the mistress and the maid. If he indulged a preference it was for Sallie, since she possessed a more immediate access to the store-room and pantry than Gerald's domestic theories ever accorded his wife; Jennifer, nevertheless,

still occupied a high place in the affections of this charming and sagacious bird; he would sit for hours upon the gilded eminence of her chair-back, while she sang, to the accompaniment of her spinet, the delicious strains of Corelli and other famous composers.

The two girls drew apart; Jennifer dried her eyes delicately upon the starched frill of Sallie's apron; Sallie used the back of her hand for the same purpose. She picked up the little lacquered breakfast tray, which she had deposited in a somewhat precarious position on the dressing table, and prepared to leave the room. Her eyes were red; an embarrassed smile made a dimple at the corner of her mouth. She bent down again, quickly, to smooth her mistress's tangled locks; these lay scattered over the tossed pillows of the bed, in a curiously detached and careless brilliance; framing the pathetic triangle of her face almost as the quiet countenance of death is crowned incongruously with bright and living hair.

"An orange now, or a little slice of melon?" asked Sallie in a wheedling tone.

"No, thank you, you excellent and devoted creature," replied Jennifer. "May I have my books, if you please? There is my prayer-book on top; it is that which I especially wish to read. And now my mirror, and the smaller flask of Cologne water; that will be all. You are a very good girl."

"If you would like me to brush your hair, ma'am—" began the faithful servant, but Jennifer squeezed her hand gratefully and pushed her from the bed with a gentle but determined obstinacy.

"No, my dear Sallie; the books at once, if you love me; and do you go and pack the boxes, taking care not to tire yourself; I shall dine in my room at twelve; you need not prepare my bath before eleven; that will give you two good working hours in the coolest part of the day."

Jennifer lay back upon embroidered linen, straightening the scalloped border of the sheet on either side; she sniffed at the Cologne water and examined herself with sympathetic interest in the quicksilver depths of the mirror; she looked pale and fatigued, but admirably calm. Next she opened the fat prayer-book, which had been her grandmother's; the robin's-egg blue of its cover had faded to aquamarine, its aureate cross was but an indentation flaked with gold-leaf. The yellow pages clung together; even the tapering finger-tips of this fairy child had trouble in disengaging their gilt edges.

"And dost subdue the raging of the sea . . ." Ah, no; that was all wrong; that was for the Bay of Biscay; she ruffled the leaves impatiently. "From lightning and tempest . . ." That would include thunder-storms, of course; that was better. "All who travel by land and by water." That was what she wanted. "From plague, pestilence, and famine; from battle, murder, and from sudden death."

The words rang ominously in her ears; they were not by any means wholly reassuring, but they appeared appropriate. "All prisoners and captives . . . and young children." It had said young children; a woman of seventeen was not a child. . . . "Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word. . . ." In peace; in darkness; in the shadow of death. "And to guide our

feet into the way of peace." Peace was a beautiful thing.

She let the prayer-book fall upon the floor, and lacked the energy to pick it up again. It was too sad; sadder than *Clarissa Harlowe*.

The next volume which came to her hand contained the works of the poet Collins; Gerald had recommended the *Persian Eclogues* to her attention.

"You should read *Petis de la Croix's* translation of the '*Zafarnama*,' if you are sincerely interested in the home of your ancestors," he had informed her gravely. "It is rendered into very pure and graceful French, and should constitute no strain whatever upon your understanding, my love; if, however, you feel inclined to begin with something lighter, I should suggest these *Persian pastorals* of Collins; they are not of course either informative or correct, but they convey to the mental palate a slight flavour of Eastern poetry in a diluted form which may appeal to your taste; at least you will derive no harm from their perusal." She looked at them now in languid appraisal of their length; she did not feel inclined, since coming to Calcutta, to pursue any amusement except sleep for more than ten minutes at a time. She dropped the book; it fell open in another place, where a marker had lain for years.

As a matter of fact, the bit of mauve silk ribbon had belonged to Lady Camphile; she had once owned a shady hat trimmed with long violet streamers, one of which she had snipped off with her garden shears to mark a certain poem in a book which her young son's tutor had but lately brought down from London; the incident occurred shortly before

her death, which calamity seemed to distress the quiet middle-aged bachelor so keenly that he actually resigned his position the following spring and departed for Philadelphia, where he joined the Quaker sect and taught school for many uneventful years. He did not, however, survive the excitement of the American Revolution.

Jennifer tossed the ribbon to one side, and fixed her attention upon the leaf which it had marked; the compact form of the poem and the assurance that it occupied no more than two printed pages encouraged her to read further. "Ode to Evening"; it was a pleasant title.

She repeated it to herself with exquisite precision, shaping the syllables with her lips as she sighed them forth in a single expulsion of breath. In spite of the peacock-blue jealousies the room was inordinately hot; a variety of exotic flowers dangled their bells or spread their cups to fill the air with fragrance; the floor was striped along its entire length by thin white lines of an excessive brightness from the murderous dazzle of the sun without. The bird drooped in his cage; below their bubble of engraved glass the gold-fish seemed expiring; the very jungle-born plants appeared to faint, rising to fall again like fountains of warm green water; the smooth forms of the jars which contained them, hammered from that flaxen-blond bell-metal of Murshidabad which has more silver than brass in its composition, illumined the darkness like lanterns of primrose-coloured silk, candle-lit within.

Jennifer flung the heavy fleece of hair away from her shoulders and began to read, saying the words aloud but very low:



“Or upland fallows grey  
 Reflect its last cool gleam . . .  
 And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires,  
 And hears their simple bell, and marks o’er all  
 Thy dewy fingers draw  
 The gradual dusky veil.”

“The gradual dusky veil.” Her eyelids closed;  
 her whisper was an evocation.

Through the transparent tissue of her eyelids the darkness was tinted with red; in Calcutta a thousand temple bells were ringing with tongues that had no silver at all in their composition; in Devonshire the Lent lilies were over.

She did not sleep, nor could she call to mind with any degree of conviction the wet April woods at Cleverly-Neville. If she evoked any memory, it did not belong in her own life. To a superstitious person it might be a matter not entirely lacking in elements of awe to know that she perceived quite plainly the picture of a grey-haired lady with a book in her hand who sat upon a stone garden bench and gazed with pensive eyes over a wide prospect of purple downs; in the twilight between sunset and moonrise; she wore Gerald’s amethyst signet ring upon her middle finger. The landscape was too young for April; the misty beech trees belonged to a backward March or a mild soft February without frost; it was a very tranquil evening.

“Now teach me, maid composed,  
 To breathe some softened strain.”

The poem was, after all, a form of prayer; Jennifer certainly derived great benefit from its reci-



tation. She lay still as a mouse until eleven o'clock, when Sallie knocked guardedly upon the door and announced her mistress's bath as ready and waiting; in its shallow receptacle of the best Cornish tin the water looked clear and inviting; it was scented with the expressed essence of the yellow jasmine, and either Mohammed or Sallie had thoughtfully sprinkled it with a handful of yellow rose leaves and sprigs of verbenas; an exhaustive search of the little chamber failed to reveal the presence of a single cobra or scorpion. Nevertheless, as Jennifer stepped through the crystal surface of the bath she felt cruelly disappointed; it was warm as new milk or human blood, and she had wished it to be colder than the moonlit air of a winter night at home.



## 8. THE TOMB OF JAHANARA



HE evening was deathly still; after the heat of the day, a certain clammy mist enveloped the garden, which suffocated the lungs and touched the flesh with a perfidious moisture; Jennifer wandered from the crowded drawing-rooms into this sinister fog; her gauzy dress hung limp as the wet leaves around her; the ringlets above her brow were curled like the tendrils of dishevelled vines. From some obscure spot where the servants waited drifted the scent of Indian tobacco, impregnated with melted sugar and rose-water and with the heavier odour of narcotics, smelling of eternal sleep.

Within the house the talk and laughter drowned the music; single notes were borne to her upon the flood of grosser sound like little flowers on a muddy stream. She had been dancing steadily for three hours; she dropped suddenly, like an escaping creature struck with a lethal shaft, upon the vague white coping of a lily-pond; before her eyes the stagnant water spread a mirror of black glass; a ray of light from the house flawed it from side to side.

Her next door neighbour had a Hindu gardener, a young Bengali with enormous earrings and pointed nails, thin, agile, pretty as a marmoset is pretty; though no more than fourteen years old his eyes were always drowsy with opium. To him she had sometimes talked, as he clipped his mistress's side of the hedge and she pricked her fingers plucking

sprigs from her own in the freshness of early morning; she had a great curiosity as to his religious convictions, and the delicate hauteur of his demeanour conformed to her theories of good breeding; she found Mohammed's scorn of the boy quite inexplicable, in which opinion Sallie concurred; Gerald was never consulted upon the subject, and remained always in complete ignorance of the youthful Brahmin's existence. She thought of the strange gods whom this child worshipped; in her mind the name of Shiva repeated itself like an incantation.

Out of Mohammed's outraged wrath and horror, out of Sallie's tittering reports of the same, a vast equivocal figure had lifted its head to stare blindly into her face; now it confronted her in the dark looking-glass of the lily-pond. Shiva the terrible, the adored; Shiva the saint of solitude, of murder, and of suicide; Shiva who had married two wives, whose names were Idleness and Death.

"Shiva the Terrible!" It is probable that she spoke the words aloud; they were immediately answered.

"May I inquire, madame, why you, who are so obviously one of the little lambs of the good God, should address yourself to this pagan and repulsive deity?"

She raised her eyes; she seemed to rise slowly and painfully from mysterious and dreadful profundities, like a diver who has dived too far and feels the weight of water obstinate to subdue his head. The acrid perfume of a very strong cheroot filled her nostrils; she saw its burning end like a vermilion planet that dappled the fog with light, and faintly illuminated the face of the man who held it; she

marked clearly the veined and corded hand which prepared to cast it into extinction.

"Oh, please do not throw your cheroot away, my dear sir," she said quickly. "I like it; it makes a little star in the darkness."

"I retain it then, with your kind permission, madame, the more gladly because the wicked insects do not love it overmuch," replied the gentleman with a strong French accent; he bowed low, and then straightened to a prodigious height against the mist; save for a decided stoop, he might easily have out-topped Gerald himself; his thinness amounted to emaciation.

Jennifer could see him more clearly now; his features were well cut along lines of aristocratic distinction, but the tight-drawn skin over his hollow temples and high cheek-bones was dark and dry as old leather; his nose, if inferior in point of size to Gerald's, surpassed it in the extreme slenderness of its aquiline form; its bridge was hardly broader than the curved edge of a knife, and seemed to threaten its parchment covering. His hair was pure silver-grey, neither snow nor pepper and salt, but burnished to the authentic brightness of a new shilling. He wore extremely short, close-clipped whiskers, which fairly glittered against his lean brown cheeks. Under his prominent eyebrows his coffee-brown eyes glittered too; they were singularly brilliant in their deep bony setting; his closed and colourless mouth was almost invisible, but when he smiled his face was scored with laughing wrinkles; his teeth were very white. His expression was at once sad, chivalrous, and amused; his voice was vivacious; Jennifer loved him on the instant.

“My dear child and honoured hostess,” he continued, “I cannot allow you to lie upon this damp and contaminated marble; every breath you draw of this miasmic air is potent to destroy. Permit me to assist you to rise; that is better, if you will accept my arm for a moment it may be better still. As I bowed over your hand this evening I noticed that it was hot; it is now quite cold; this is not well. You do not remember me; my name is Saint Amond; I am by nationality French, by profession a soldier; my little star is Mars.”

His teeth flashed in a smile as he tightened them upon his cheroot for a single pull; Jennifer admired the way he held it away from him, his fingers fastidiously bent like the claws of a proud bird.

He had drawn her to her feet; she leaned against him and listened; the face of Shiva had receded, but the outer fringes of the night were still full of menace, and she did not care to speak.

“I am at the present moment the guest of my kind friend, M. Chevillard at Ghyretty House; he as you know is the Governor of our province of Pondicherry. It is a pleasant country spot, not five miles from Chandernagore; to an exile like myself it is almost a bit of France mercifully transplanted to build an oasis in the desert. My month’s leave will be over to-morrow; I walked in this garden to struggle against despair, perhaps to hope for a blessed visitation of cholera or typhus. I was very wicked; I am a Christian, and as such I do not importune Shiva; are you not also a Christian, madame? You have the face of a young martyr who must perish at the first turn of the thumb-

screw; you would be safer in a shrine, I think, than in this execrable place. I have watched your countenance to-night, and I do not like to see the little lambs of God so sorrowful. For me, it is sufficiently fitting; I have deserved it; my folly has demanded it; sorrow is my meat and drink. For you it is as poisonous as that thick and fatal water at your feet; flee from it, madame, before it is too late." He was still smiling, but his voice was urgent and incisive.

"To-morrow you go to Delhi!" he cried in a higher key, his accent becoming more marked as his excitement increased. "Do you at all realise what that means, in this country, at this season? The doctors are mad; your husband is a dangerous lunatic. Your pardon, madame, for the speech's impoliteness; its truth is evident. Your friends are perhaps guilty of no more than criminal negligence; from your parents you are sundered by immense distances. It remains for me, madame, a stranger, old enough to be your father, gentle enough to be your confessor, to rescue you from this insanity. Return with me to Pondicherry to-night; my kind friend Chevillard will receive you with all due honour; his wife will assume a mother's rôle until we have taken steps to convey you to England in health and safety. You trust me; your eyes tell me as much; will you not come?"

Jennifer shook her head voicelessly; she was without hope. Her curls fell forward over her bended brow and swung back and forth like little bronze bells, silent with doom. The Frenchman sighed profoundly; he was too wise to entertain any doubts of the finality of her decision; her very lethargy was



more unconquerable than the most determined combativeness.

"If it is not to be the shrine, it must then be the other thing," he muttered to himself, knowing that she was not listening; he saw her stretched upon the rack, but his dry and sunken eyes refused to yield a tear to the atrocious spectacle; he was perhaps too great a fatalist to be wholly a Christian; he read too much Seneca, and his heart was broken.

"*Adieu, madame,*" he said sadly, taking her hand very softly between his harsh and roughened palms. "I wish you better fortune; it may be that a worthier one than myself will be sent to rescue you. I have been a soldier of France, I have sometimes fought well, but always my impetuosity has been my undoing; it has brought undeserved disgrace upon an honoured name. I am happy only in possessing loyal friends; I must assuredly die an exile. Doubtless I have many weary years to survive; you will not believe it, my child, but I am only forty-six; every fever in India has burned me in its fire, and yet I was not consumed; the snakes have splintered their fangs against my hide to small purpose; I am, I grieve to say, invulnerable. I am an officer of cavalry; I have the singular misfortune to be military instructor at the court of Hyder Ali. The success of the young Tippoo Sahib in the invasion of the Carnatic was largely due to my teaching; I have made him a clever leader of horse, but I cannot change his reprehensible character, in which, as in Nero's, levity and the most savage lust for blood are monstrously combined. God help the next victims of his rapacious cruelty, and forgive me my sin in having trained it to effective use. *Adieu,*

madame, once more; I wish you a nobler rescuer than my poor self." He loosed her hand and prepared to depart; until this moment Jennifer had not spoken a single word.

With a swiftness truly amazing to him, who had felt the lax droop of her shoulder against his arm during the whole of his monologue, she caught him round the neck, standing on tiptoe and clinging to him with the feeble force of her desperation. Her gauzy draperies tore upon the gilt buttons of his uniform; her hair was a wet tangle under his chin. He was too tall; she dropped her arms and raised them again to bury her face in her hands.

"I cannot go with you; I cannot possibly go with you," she said. "But in the name of heaven I entreat you to stay with me; do not leave me; I cannot bear you to leave me. You are kind; you are apparently very wise; I am sure you will not leave me. You are the first person whom I have seen since quitting Devonshire who was in the least like my father; you have a nose like my father's; you are tall; your hands are brown like his; you are very kind. Would you not by any chance accompany us on our journey? I should feel so much safer in your presence; oh, sir, I do with all my heart entreat you not to leave me alone!"

The unhappy man begged her to come with him instead; he would have carried her away in his arms but for the proximity of the house and the certainty of detection. But her cowardice was like adamant; she would not go, though he asked her on his knees. Finally he left her; he was distraught, and contracted a severe fever in consequence of the night's adventure, a fever which he survived for

twenty exiled years. Jennifer never forgot him; she soon, however, lost the memory of his tortured face, and retained only the recollection of the pressure of his kind and withered hands upon her hands.

It is quite useless to attempt an adequate description of the amazing journey to Delhi; its splendours, dangerous escapes and incredible adventures are best left to the imagination of the reader. Jennifer preferred the motion of her luxurious palanquin to the swaying insecurity which might have purchased her the superior position occupied by her husband upon the back of an elephant; she never forgot the astonishing spectacle of Gerald, straight as a lance and stiff as a poker, accommodating himself in some uncanny fashion to the swinging pace of the monstrous animal; his face remained as immobile as a carved Buddha beneath the green umbrella which he habitually carried. In the hands of any other man this article would be beyond peradventure of a doubt have appeared ludicrous in the extreme; Gerald, with his air of an ambiguous god demanding silent tribute from an unmannerly universe which he had just succeeded in taming, made the umbrella as awful as a sceptre and as ornamental as a lotus-flower. He disdained to carry an ankus; if a bearer prodded the hinder parts of the great beast now and then, it was not in Gerald's elevated province to be aware of the circumstance.

Enveloped in a fawn-coloured cloak of heavy Chinese silk, with his pale face burned by the sun to the exact shade of a delicately toasted biscuit, and his yellow hair bleached by the same powerful agency to approximately a like tint, he was a curious

and commanding figure, the incarnation of some ivory idol of remote antiquity. His simple dignity far transcended that of any mere modern image of an eastern deity; the gates of Lhasa would assuredly have fallen before his majestic and inexpressive countenance.

Save for the green umbrella, he condescended to no covering for his erect and narrow head; the natives regarded him with increased respect and fear after the passage of the first noontide over him without the faintest sign upon his part that his brains were boiling in his skull preparatory to death by sunstroke; when he failed to topple from his lofty station in the manner which they had so confidently expected their reliance upon their own judgment was naturally shaken, while their belief in his superhuman qualities was as inevitably augmented.

To relate the history of Jennifer's private experiences upon this pilgrimage would of necessity entail so long a list of fears, tears, fainting fits, smelling-salts, cambric handkerchiefs steeped in lavender water, sleeping potions and chincona pills that the interest in such a tale of suffering would infallibly flag; suffice it to say that she survived to behold the great wall of Delhi rise at last against the seemingly interminable turquoise distance. It is probable that Sallie was largely instrumental in saving her mistress's life by her unremitting attentions and her great skill in concocting cooling beverages from fruits according to the directions furnished her by Mohammed; she had a much lighter hand than the manservant, attributable perhaps to her

experiences as a still-room maid upon her first introduction into the household at Cleverly-Neville at the age of twelve.

Gerald did all that lay in his power to mitigate the horrors of the journey; he always insisted that champagne was more refreshing than sal-volatile, and had the good fortune to be able to present Jennifer with that strange and sumptuous curiosity, the skin of the rare black and white Bengal tiger, a superb specimen of which wonders he shot early one morning in a jungle so profoundly sunk in green depths of vegetation as to render it far darker than a starry midnight in open country. Jennifer, hearing the shots and assuming at once that they portended dangers, buried her eyes in the pillows and refused to move during the entire day, which she spent in a state of comparative insensibility; by evening, however, she was sufficiently recovered to be induced to listen to Gerald's stirring account of the whole affair, which he followed by an enthusiastic dissertation relative to his wife's imagined loveliness at some future time when the tiger-skin should be properly cured and mounted and Jennifer suitably arranged upon its surface in a pose and costume worthy the pied magnificence of their couch.

At a much later date this spoil of victory certainly formed a prodigiously fine floor-covering for the small music room which its owner constructed for its especial reception; a piano of polished ebony, totally without decoration, a few ebony chairs, and several exquisite examples of black and white Wedgwood completed the furnishings of this fantastic apartment. The room was circular in shape and attained no little celebrity in the London of



the Regency under the title of Camphile's Magpie Chamber.

As the travellers passed through the parched and arid suburbs of Delhi, Jennifer perceived in the distance a noble building of rose-coloured sandstone inlaid with white marble; it stood in a terraced garden, the whole surrounded by an embattled wall, with watch-towers and four defensible gates. Farther away, crimson against the azure sky of waning afternoon, a monumental column out-topped all visible erections; its gigantic plinth was a polygon of twenty sides.

Jennifer's words were smothered in her mouth; the heat was intense, but her awe at beholding these stupendous sepulchres and towers was largely responsible for her inability to breathe. Gerald had dismounted and walked beside her, holding her hand; Mohammed carried the green umbrella. Her husband's long fingers were firm and slightly chilly around the limpness of her own; his amethyst signet shone cool as a grape frosted with autumnal bloom.

"These, my child, are the graves of your deceased relatives," he said, bowing politely in the general direction of the huge buildings. "That roseate fortress is none other than the tomb of Hamayun, second of the Mogul dynasty." His forensic manner was perfect; of the gravity of his secret mind she could not feel so certain.

"I confess I fail to comprehend you, Gerald," she said with a feeble peevishness, rendered forgivable by the fact that the heat was undoubtedly very enervating. "I do not consider it fair to tease me when I am so exceedingly tired. I have never un-



derstood in the least your motive in saying that I have relatives in these wild places; would to God that the thing were true!" And she began to cry in contemplating the vast comfort which might imaginably have been derived from the presence of a great-uncle or an acidulous aunt within those looming walls; she would have kissed her most scornful Lorn cousin with rapture.

Gerald, pacing noiselessly through the thick red dust of the road, appeared to ruminate before replying.

"Have you forgotten your descent from the great Tamburlaine?" he inquired with surprise. "I cannot credit such a lapse of memory upon your part; I myself can only claim a drop of bastard William's blood, yet in my youth I stood upon the battlements of Falaise with my very heart in my throat and my eyes so dazzled that I could not see the spring fields of Normandy spread below me like a flowered petticoat left to dry on the river bank by my fair ancestress when love called her up the steep and winding stair to bed with her overlord; my Plantagenet strain is rendered questionable by the confusion of the Crusades, yet think you that I scaled the crumbling sides of Château Gaillard and mounted breathlessly to its summit without a fierce and passionate pride in Richard of the Lion Heart tearing at my breast-bone? To be sure, I was no more than nineteen at the time; ten years have taught me a sterner and more controlled deportment; nevertheless I believe that if at this moment I were passing, as you are passing, into the ancient city conquered in 1398 by my honoured forebear Tamburlaine the Tartar, I should be much

tempted to fall on my knees and kiss the reverend ground, at once hallowed and made bloody by his victories. But enough of sentiment; he was no kin of mine, and for you I fear the exertion might prove fatiguing."

With which considerate words he ended his oratory, and stroked her hand reassuringly while mopping his brow with a white silk handkerchief, a precaution which appeared quite unnecessary owing to the amazing circumstance of his face having retained, during the whole of this eloquent speech, the calm detachment and pallor of a fine slice of cold chicken.

"I should be most happy to do as you suggest," his wife replied in a very shaky voice, "were I not convinced that there are snakes in the dust."

"Quite possibly there are, my love," said Gerald kindly. "The karait, famed as the deadliest snake in India, inhabits just such dust as is now so unfortunately furring my boots; the heel must be well shod which is to be set upon that fellow's head, I assure you. Yet he is no bigger than a pretty green garter snake which would scarcely succeed in frightening an English lady planting lilies of the valley in the shade. Life is obscure; the event is inexplicable always to the asking mind."

He stooped and deliberately rummaged in the dust at his feet, as if searching for the squirming threads of death it might contain; then he straightened himself, smiling a little, and carefully wiped his thin fingers on the handkerchief; against the bright silver sheen of the new silk the marks of his finger-tips were red.

At this period Shah Alam had reigned in Delhi

for perhaps two years; his rule was a mere pretence on the part of the Mahrattas; the true power lay in the hands of their leader, Sindhia. The Shah was permitted to retain to a certain degree the state and circumstance suitable to his exalted name; Gerald made sure of being royally entertained at the court, and indulged no doubt of his own ability to soothe the sentiments of the Shah in the little matter of Kora and Allahabad, which Hastings had somewhat high-handedly transferred to the Vizier of Oudh over the head of Clive's contrary transaction with the Mogul prince. He was not disappointed; the monarch fell upon his neck with protestations of undying friendship, and though his brow darkened at the mention of Hastings' name, it was wiped smooth again by the first of Gerald's quiet compliments, coincident in point of time with that masterly player's third move in a game of chess which the two were indulging in after the evening meal; it was an amazingly clumsy blunder, and Alam beat him with ease.

Jennifer slept for a week, waking only to partake of delicacies conveyed to her with the respectful homage of the Shah; Gerald experienced no ill effects whatever from his protracted travels. At the end of that time his wife arose, greatly refreshed by the savoury and cooling remedies of the Shah's *cuisine*. Attired in white, and veiled almost like a bride in frail Italian laces against the heat of the declining sun, she accompanied her husband and their royal host upon a complete tour of the palace of Shah Jehan; the Hall of Public Audience pleased her with its golden dome and engrailed arches, but the Hall of Private Audience amazed her almost

to tears, and she declared, to the Shah's secret amusement and Gerald's even more secret annoyance, that she would very willingly spend her entire life within its confines, if she might have all the sherbets and candied limes that she wished and a stringed orchestra to play Scotch ballads and Italian opera when she was melancholy.

Forthwith she began to sing Miss Elliot's beautiful Lament for Flodden; it is probable that no stranger vision was ever devised by destiny than that of Jennifer Lorn standing in the exact centre of the miraculous pavilion of white marble and lifting her mournful little voice to cry, 'I've heard them liltin' at our ewe-milkin' . . . The flowers of the forest are all wede away."

Around her upon every hand were flowers innumerable of serpentine, lapis lazuli, and red and purple porphyry; they formed a delicate design upon the arches and patterned the silver ceiling above her head. Repeated in each panel over the narrow arched doorways at the ends of the hall, ran a scrolled inscription in Persian; Alam courteously translated the words to his lovely guest, bending low to whisper in her ear:

"If Paradise be on this earth, it is this, it is this, it is this."

"It is certainly the most delightful room that I ever beheld; I should like to live in it forever, and I am shockingly tired of travel," replied Jennifer.

"Ah, but you must see Agra," Gerald whispered in her other ear; Jennifer bowed her head beneath the jewelled trellises of constellated flowers and leaves.

"It is a pity that the Peacock Throne no longer

embellishes your palace," said Gerald to Shah Alam; he felt distinctly displeased by the latter's very marked attentions to Jennifer during the course of their stroll, and he possessed to perfection the art of snubbing without offence. "It is a great loss; the larger hall looks somewhat bare without some such decoration; I wonder if the tale be well accredited which places it in Persia at the present time. I have always believed that it was borne off among the spoils of victory after the regrettable invasion of your charming country in '38; the conquerors of Karnal and the plains of Peshawar must have been put to some slight trouble in order to convey it through the Khyber Pass, but I make no doubt that it is now in Shiraz or Isfahan. Perhaps you and I, Jennifer, my child, may have the pleasure of viewing it when we visit Persia, a course upon which I am irrevocably determined. The French jeweller Tavernier, who saw the throne in the latter half of the last century, reports it as being of amazing richness and exquisite beauty, the expanded tails of the two peacocks being so inlaid with sapphires, rubies, emeralds, and other precious stones of appropriate colours as to represent life; upon the pearls encircling the twelve column and the canopy he set an even higher value."

The Shah clutched at the diamonds upon his breast, and cast his eyes to heaven; the vividness of the picture drawn by Gerald was painful to him, but he could not resent the perfect courtesy of his guest's conversation. He did not miss the hint, so deftly introduced, of an English embassy to Persia, and this point gave him pause in his cogitations; he had thought of sending an embassy to



Persia from his own court of Delhi, and he asked himself whether the King of England, the Governor-General of India, or his old friend the Honourable Gerald Poyntard had been accorded by providence a devilish power of reading the hidden minds of Eastern princes. Jennifer looked up at the two faces; the dark and the pale were equally impassive; behind its mystery the Shah's topaz gaze smouldered a little, but Gerald's eyes were cold as pebbles in a brook.

"We are unable to remain much longer to trespass upon your munificent hospitality," continued Gerald with suave but vigorous decision. "It is unfortunate that we must return to Calcutta before taking ship for Bushire; I should have preferred to follow the path of Nadir Shah through the stupendous passes of those mountains which in ancient Sanscrit are well christened 'Snow-Abode'; the low temperature would be a delightful change. But needless to say I must consult with His Excellency before taking my departure on a mission so important. If you will make it possible for my wife and myself to visit Agra under the most favourable conditions I shall esteem it as a mark of sincere kindness; pray do not put yourself to the trouble of accompanying us, as the journey would but weary you; besides, affairs of state demand your presence here; your adoring people need you. I should like to behold the Taj once more under the rays of the full moon; my almanac tells me that ten days from this date she will have reached her supreme moment of splendour. I have a fancy, my love"—he turned to Jennifer—"to see you stand mirrored in the waters which surround that Titanic bubble blown in

mother-of-pearl; I have a fancy to see you etched like an exquisite impertinence against that background of mortal grief conjured into still solemnities of marble; you must wear your white satin with the very full hoops, and Sallie must dress your hair as if you were about to dine with the Dauphiness; I trust the girl has not neglected to bring a supply of powder."

When the Shah seized the opportunity of suggesting that the court metal-workers immediately prepare a quantity of gold and silver-dust ground finer than rice-flour, Gerald informed him with polite contempt that he used only the best French brands, citing a certain shop in the rue Saint Denis as the only true source of tonsorial elegance to be found under heaven.

"I do not really care for Eastern cosmetics, my dear friend," he concluded, permitting a discreet flavour of honey to tinge the acid of his voice, "I do not approve of the use of kohl; henna I deprecate; I have never been tempted to dye my beard blue." And he stroked his smooth chin, smiling at Jennifer; she tried to picture him in a turban, with a perfumed mass of hair curling about his narrow jaw. It was hard to imagine; once imagined, it was horrible; the yellow waxen mask above the beard of indigo evoked abominable things.

Upon the last afternoon of their stay at the court of Alam, Gerald rode with his wife to the ruins of old Delhi, where stood the gigantic tower of ruddy sand-stone whose plinth was a polygon of twenty sides; the sunset overlaid it with a stronger sanguine. Gerald, for once, was slightly wearied

by antiquity; he sat upon a fallen column of monumental size; its capital bore the ancient honeysuckle with bead and reel ornament, but he did not trouble to examine this. Having taken the wise precaution of carrying a book in his coat pocket, he was speedily immersed in the comedies of Terence; of these he was inordinately fond.

"I am heartily sick of Tartars and Barbarians," he announced. "I had rather see the Coliseum by moonlight than twenty Taj Mahals; I wish we were in Rome. There, my dear, would be a good background for you, if you like, classic and magnificent; you are not exactly in the grand style yourself, you are rather the Clytie of Annibale Caracci engraved by Signor Bartolozzi, but by that token you would be the more engaging with the ghost of Rome howling above you, its thumb implacably subversed over your loveliness. Wander among these stones if it amuses you; I will resume my reading. Terence is perennially charming to my mind; Montaigne applies to him the phrase of Horace, '*Liquidus paroque simillimus amni*'; it is well deserved." He turned to his book; the slight wave of his hand was sufficient dismissal for Jennifer.

She walked slowly away from him; it may be that she felt a little lonely. She found a hidden grave some distance from the others; harsh dusty grass grew over it, the inscription upon its worn surface was scarcely legible, its stone was coarse and crumbling. Jennifer could not read the chiselled words; she wondered what they meant. She sat swinging her little heels; waiting for Gerald to finish his book; under the shadow of the Minar

tower she was no bigger than a gauze-winged fly. Below her silken ruffles the epitaph spoke silently in stone to this effect:

“Throw only a few blades of grass upon my tomb; that is all which should conceal the last seclusion of the humble.

“Here sleeps the unfortunate and ephemeral Jahanara, daughter of the Emperor Shah Jahan and pupil of a poor fakir.”



*Book Three:* THE PRINCE









## *Book Three: THE PRINCE*

### *1. THE RED EARTHEN BOWL*

**O**N a summer's afternoon of the most exquisite and entranced loveliness, two men sat upon a pink marble bench in the back garden of Kerim Khan's palace at Shiraz; the moveless atmosphere about them was saturated with the scent of roses; rose-petals, yellow or delicately flushed with the colours of a shell, lay unregarded at their feet; the shadow of an oak-tree formed a circular pool upon the grass, blue and distinct as the royal fish-ponds farther down the slope of emerald lawn. In this refreshing shade their limbs felt cool and relaxed as if it were indeed water instead of air which supported them; their faces were smoothed to an almost inane contentment.

They conversed in low unhurried voices, and at the same time they sipped delicately some amber liquid contained in little sherbet cups of pale-green porcelain; a large blue platter of transparent glass was set between them, and this was heaped with gigantic cakes of a curled and crackling thinness, liberally sprinkled with powdered sugar and slightly burnt along the edges. Above the sherbet cups there

rose a fragrance poignant and ethereal; the cakes, hot from the oven, steamed with spice and honey.

"Mirza Abbas," said the older of the two, patting his companion on the shoulder with a gesture at once fraternal and fatherly, "for the twentieth time I take pleasure in assuring you that no one but yourself has ever been permitted by an indulgent providence to attain complete perfection in the art of baking elephant's ears; these in particular . . . ah, my boy, not any of the seven tongues which I speak with such faulty fluency has words wherein to praise them as they should be praised; four of these languages are living and three of them are dead, but were these mighty dead to arise and unloose the mouths of Homer and Vergil and King David himself from the grave, their eloquence could never . . ."

The rest of his speech was rendered unintelligible by reason of his rapid consumption of the cakes, which he folded skilfully into compact squares and inserted between his strong white teeth in a somewhat absent-minded manner.

He was a singularly handsome man, tall and vigorous; his complexion was fresh and sanguine, his features possessed a symmetry so striking that they suggested the Hermes of Praxiteles turned a light-hearted forty. He was attired in a great Arabian cloak of camel's hair, in which an approximate and evidently intentional sable hue had been produced by varied dyes, now showing strange tints of green and purple under the influence of sun and rain. His thick and curling locks half concealed a small portion of his scalp which might have been either an incipient baldness or a neglected tonsure; the profusion of his dark brown hair, touched here and

there by grey, hinted at the latter explanation of this phenomenon.

His broad torso and brawny shoulders moved under the heavy stuff of his mantle with the deliberation of tremendous strength; beneath the sun-burned skin of his bare calves and ankles the muscles flowed like waves. His hands were disproportionately small, with short blunt fingers and square nails; the arches of his feet stood up from the grass as if they had been builded out of stone by a clever engineer. Around his classic lips there played a smile of sly and humorous mockery; his eyes were of a most brilliant sapphire blue, and their amazing size was made conspicuous by the length and blackness of the lashes; the colour and clarity of their gaze was like that of an amiable infant. He looked affectionately at the young man seated beside him, whose appearance presented so surprising a contrast to his own.

"My son," he said kindly, "have another drop of my apricot brandy; it goes grandly with your confectionary, and it will do you no harm, being about as potent as barley water, and fitter, I think, to perfume a lady's handkerchief than to warm the cockles of a prince's heart."

His companion, a slim and languid youth of perhaps nineteen or twenty indolent Persian summers, frowned vaguely and bit his lip with his little sharp teeth before replying; his right hand, inordinately slender, and noiseless as the air through which it slid, poured a few drops of golden liquor into the cup at his side; his left hand lay negligently upon his narrow knees; his large dark eyes were fixed upon the pearly clouds above the tree-tops.

"I should not; I consider it sinful," he murmured sadly. The drops united to form a trickle; the cup brimmed; he raised it to his mouth and sipped the brandy with melancholy appreciation.

"I think it is very good, my dear friend; I find it quite strong enough, too; my dissatisfaction is with myself. I violate my principles as I drink." He drained the cup, and set it down with a gesture of quiet despair.

"You talk like a Sunnite," replied the other with good-humoured contempt. "I cannot conceive where you discover these principles of yours, my son; to the descendant of Ismail they should be abhorrent; to the poetical dabbler in Magian necromancies they should be fatiguing, to the Christian you are soon to become they should be ridiculous. For the present, let us grant that you are still a Mohammedan, but has your advanced Sufism room for these petty prejudices? They are positively Turkish."

The youth regarded him with dignity; he raised his eyebrows, but his voice remained low; a quality of weariness crept into it as he spoke.

"It is not a question of inherited principles; it is a purely personal matter, between my own conscience and myself. I do not entirely understand my feeling; I am simply convinced that for me it is wrong to indulge in alcohol. My mother has striven for some years to overcome this unhappy prejudice, as you call it; she would agree with all you say; my eccentricity has caused her much pain. But—I am what I am."

He drank another cup of brandy, then sat silent, with compressed lips and folded arms. Save for

the tragic expression of his countenance, he was in all particulars the complete prince of an Arabian Nights entertainment; a dandy, a troubadour, a silken sprig of extravagant royalty.

He was clothed in a shirt of fine cotton cloth, lavishly embroidered at the throat with minute flowers in threads of white and gold; his loose trousers, of the same material, terminated in narrow slippers of thin grass green morocco; the extreme slenderness of his waist was defined by a broad black belt of varnished leather, the clasp of which was a solid mass of magnificent emeralds. His garments were like snow; his whole person breathed of clean linen and rose-water; his neatness was superlative. A short tunic, patterned like a Cashmere shawl in black and violet and green, was flung upon the trampled rose-leaves at his feet. The crown of his head was shaved; above his ears the dark hair was drawn forward into two love-locks which encroached upon the smooth pallor of his cheeks. If he wore no beard, the omission represented no deliberate disregard of Persian fashions; he was very young. The faintest possible penciling of down sketched a tentative line along his upper lip; his eyebrows were traced in scarcely visible curves. His features were delicate; what they lacked in decisive chiselling was more than atoned for by the perfection of their finish. His long brown eyes might have belonged to a little brother of Semiramis; his finger-nails were filed into sharp points.

"My dear boy," said the elder man solicitously, replenishing the small cup with a generous hand, "I entreat you not to fall into another fit of despondency; it cannot fail to ruin your digestion.



See, it is a delectable afternoon, and you are talking to the most agreeable if perhaps the most ignorant person in Persia; your task for to-day is over; to-morrow's will of necessity be light, since the declining health of the Shah gives him so great a partiality for simple broths and stewed fowls; your talented assistants are quite competent to deal with any culinary problem which may arise during your most protracted absence. You are young; you are charming both in mind and appearance; you display real genius in the art to which your life is dedicated; why should you repine? It grieves me to witness this waste of your happiest years; only the suspicion that sorrow is a great delight to you restrains me from weeping with you on every possible occasion. Come, my lad; eat, drink, and be merry; to-morrow the Shah may die, and I may have the pleasure of assisting you to ascend the throne of Abbas the Great."

The young Persian smiled sadly; slowly his brown eyes filled with tears. He lifted one hand; for a moment a spectral sceptre hovered in the air. Then he crumpled his fingers together with a gesture of disgust.

"No, Father O'Donnell," he said somewhat haughtily. "No, such vanities are not for me. I am not a conqueror"—his lip curled slightly—"I am an artist."

"Well, well," replied Father O'Donnell amiably. "Just have it as you like. . . . I merely thought that you might enjoy the palace, and the patronage of poets, and such trifles; I was not advising you to conduct a campaign against the Ottoman Empire; in fact, I should strongly deprecate the course.

But the bauble shall be taken away, by all means and immediately, my son."

"These cryptic assurances of yours are a little trying now and then," murmured the youth. "To what do you refer, pray, if I may ask?"

"Criminal records of the past, dear lad. 'Tis ignorance on my part; ignorance and sheer emptiness of mind. Things float in and out of it; 'tis the mind of an infant before whose eyes bright and curious things are continually dangled in a daze. I should have been a scholar; my parents treated me very ill in the matter of my education. However, no more of that for the present; 'tis your story and not mine that shall be told to-day, as you promised faithfully over the last batch of peach brandy I distilled in the dovecote."

A changed smile flickered like sunlight over the melancholy countenance of Prince Abbas; the smile of a man about to speak of himself; he appeared almost jocund. The late sunlight was indeed thrusting long fingers of faint and gilded rose colour through the dark leaves of the oak tree; earth and sky seemed unsubstantial as tints and fragrances of flowers.

"If you so desire," he said gently, inclining his head a little and lowering his eyes.

"My life has been a sad one, as you know, dear friend," he began in a controlled but slightly fatigued voice; the prismatic sparkle of a tear was distinctly visible among his lashes. "My life has been a sad one," he repeated in a corroborative whisper to himself.

"The sadness is not in your life, 'tis in your own heart, my child," said Father O'Donnell. "You

have a fine life compared to many poor devils around these very premises who are laughing and roaring all day and all night; to be sure these are mostly Kurds or even Ethiopian slaves, but their happiness is evident enough in spite of that. You have grand clothes and yet grander viands; drink you can get by a word to me or a visit to old Ismail the fruiterer in the new bazaar whom I've converted to the Christian faith and whose vineyards yield the best grapes to be found in the environs of Shiraz. Life's a strong fluid running from the conduits of heaven into our veins; pipe it through a little glass tube like yourself and the pressure is bound to be painful; the speed and spate of it will maybe crack you. Your chemists and elderly magicians hereabouts have many such tubes of azure glass, sapphire like this plate or the colour of sea-water; pretty as jewels they are but not so durable; they are all very well for measuring and testing and pouring a gold drop here and a silver drop there, but fill them up with harsh new wine and they'd burst like bubbles. An old earthen pipe like myself is dry and thirsty and so a most voracious drinker of life at its source; I'm no more to be split by the vital stream than if I were stone or steel. Stone and steel you'll find, slender and inflexible or ragged with moss like an ancient well; copper twisted like the worm in Ismail's still; bright wheaten straws through which a tiny trickle may meander. I've seen great souls bearing rivers heavier than those which flow along Roman aqueducts; they'd no more mind or indeed notice the vast weight of water than if it had been the dew of a summer evening such as this. But your pardon, my boy; I have as usual

interrupted you; your pardon, pray continue your narrative at once."

"I am the last hope of the Safawid Dynasty," remarked the youth, with a pensive pride which ignored the interruption. "I am practically the final Haidari. My unfortunate cousin Shah Rukh enjoys a pathetic shadow of power under the protection of the chief of the Abdali Afghans; blinded by the atrocious orders of the head Mullah at Meshed, rendered half-imbecile by many indignities received at the hands of Jiafir the Kurd and Mir Alam the Arabian, his state is hardly enviable. His royal blood is tainted by an admixture of the robber blood of Nadir; only upon his mother's side is he a Safawid. Poor puppet king—I can but pity him!"

"You are talking in blank verse, my lad," cried Father O'Donnell warningly. "Your sympathetic sentiments concerning your unfortunate relative are very edifying, but I wish to hear more of yourself, and more especially of your boyhood, and the influences which swayed you in your choice of a profession. In spite of my complete ignorance of history, the subject has long delighted me; it is a satisfying thing to know that you are of the noble Haidari, the Lionine, the House of Ismail, whose warriors cast their armour to the winds with disdain of other protection than the great cry of Shiah. So, my little cream-coloured cat of Isfahan, you are indeed a lion-cub by inheritance. Strange, strange, strange; and your father was a poet, and you are a cook! Ah, child, I wish you could collect the energy to climb, with the help of God and his poor servant Francis O'Donnell, upon the throne so soon to be vacated by the providential death of Kerim

Khan. He is long past seventy, and you have exceptional opportunities—”

“What?” shrieked Abbas, in a voice of hysterical horror. “Are you suggesting poison?” Cold beads of sweat stood out upon his smooth brow; his lips assumed a greenish hue.

“Is this attack attributable to professional honour, or is it merely an ethical scruple?” inquired Father O'Donnell with cool and kindly scorn. “Curious to observe,” he went on placidly, “with what malign persistence these suspicions dog the footsteps of the Companions of Jesus. Your question was worthy of the young Puritans of Port Royal; you are a coward, my child, and did I not know your mind fairly well, and love its innocence and its absurdity, I should be angry. I shall not trouble for my own sake to explain away your fears; in order to calm your agitation, I shall condescend to assure you of the benignity of my intentions towards that worthy Paynim within the palace. He is a harmless old man; if he has too many wives, the same may be said of Solomon. I meant no more than the simple truth of his extreme age, and your own popularity in Shiraz. I was about to remark that you possess exceptional opportunities for reaching your people's hearts through their stomachs.”

Abbas swallowed hard once or twice; slowly the colour returned to his arrogant little face; a dark flush succeeded his pallor. He glanced with secret misgiving at the face of his friend; it was not wickedness that he now feared to find; it was ridicule. But the profile of Father O'Donnell was lifted to the appearing stars; it had the pure gravity of an antique cameo. The prince sighed with relief; he



felt slightly faint, and, finding that nothing except a delicate scent of apricots lingered in the flask at his side, he plucked a rose and crushed it in his hand in order that its sharp sweetness might revive his soul.

"Forgive me, my dear friend and second father," he said humbly. "The fault was mine, yet if you knew how distressingly frequent are the plots, counterplots, poisonings and other malpractices, in the vicinity of this court, you would not wonder at my passing thought; such things are common here, and congenial to the Persian character; perhaps I was less shocked than you believe. The truth is this; the contemplation of so great a crime, not against the body of a senile usurper, but against the very spirit of my art, that exquisite and fragile spirit whose every ingredient is a divine inspiration, shook me to the foundations of my being and induced a momentary giddiness which is now, I am happy to assure you, rapidly passing away." He ate a rose-leaf, and appeared completely restored.

"If I knew!" exclaimed Father O'Donnell with considerable indignation. "And who, may I inquire, is so likely to know of these doings as myself? 'Tis not that I hear a large variety of confessions as yet; that will come in its own time, when I have vanquished the indulgent image of Mahound in many hearts. But this to me—who have lived at the festering courts of Spain and France and Italy! Let me inform you, presumptuous boy, that your secret diplomacy is not nearly so discreditable as you seek to represent. You will never make a statesman, so much is evident, but that is no reason why you should not make a very pretty king. Ha!



Haidari!" His mighty laugh made the moon-silvered oak leaves shake like aspens upon the air; between them the moon trembled in the unmoving blue.

"Did you ever hear tell of the Borgias, now, or the Medicis? I've a special fancy for Cæsar myself," he went on ruminatively. Abbas smiled.

"Naturally I am not ignorant of the famous characters to whom you refer," he said in a patronising tone, shrugging his shoulders. "The last mentioned is often celebrated in terms of praise by our Eastern poets; he ranks with Timur and Iskander. I am not a child."

"Indeed?" inquired the other in a voice of gentle amazement. "'Tis because you wear no beard that I'm apt to forget your age, I suppose. But to your story; I wish to hear of the child you must once have been."

"As all Shiraz remembers," began Abbas, in a languid manner touched by pale forensic fire, "I am the only son of that prince whom the Afghan robber Nadir murdered at the age of ten; I mean, of course, to say that the bandit believed my poor father to have been murdered, whereas he was in reality smuggled from his prison, in a large hamper of dirty linen, by certain devoted servants of our family, descendants of those same Turks whom Timur freed out of compliment to my reverend forebear at Ardebil during the fourteenth century. I have often heard my poor father complain of the frightful suffering inflicted upon his sensitive and fastidious soul by the necessity of lying quite still with his face under the red cotton neckerchief of some one who was either a stable-boy or a camel-

driver, and who should have sent his neckerchief to be washed several weeks prior to the date of my poor father's escape. The little sufferer survived the terrible experience, however, being more fortunate in this than his cousin the son of Tahmasp, who had been given a choice of conveyances owing to his superior rank. This ill-fated child decided upon a wine-jar, and the jar being full owing to gross neglect and stupidity on the part of the servants, perished miserably by drowning. Though he was a scion of the reigning branch of the family, and my poor father but a crownless prince, it was well known at the time that Nadir desired the death of the latter most ardently; my father was precociously gifted with poetic genius, and was in addition the grandson of my ancestral namesake Mirza Abbas whom the dying Suleiman would have set upon his throne in place of the cowardly Hosain, later victim of that inhuman monster Mahmud." He leaned back panting and fanned himself with a small illuminated book drawn from the embroidered pocket of his blouse.

Father O'Donnell examined him with sympathetic interest. "And has the little cream-coloured cat of Isfahan so much of the lion blood in him after all?" he said, more to himself than to the exhausted prince at his side. "But no more of that; tell me now how did you come to take up cooking?"

The eyes of Abbas grew dreamy upon the dreaming prospect of lawn and pool and moonlight; he plucked another rose and sniffed it peacefully before replying. "You admit, then, that it is an art?" he said, turning upon his friend with a perfectly perceptible defiance stiffening his languor.

"Because if you do not, I'm not prepared to argue the point with you; I feel too deeply, I may even say too painfully upon the subject to air it to an unsympathetic listener; my heart-strings are involved and wound up in this matter, and I would not willingly open my heart to a mocker." He stared, pale and suspicious, into the other's face.

"Do I? But do I not, indeed?" cried Father O'Donnell with enthusiasm, slapping the prince upon the back with so hearty a kindness that the boy reeled where he reclined in the corner of the pink marble bench. "And now to our fat-tailed sheep, my lad with moon on forehead and star on chin!"

"Such ornamentations of the face with gold-leaf have long since gone out of style," Abbas remarked in parentheses. "But this is the way it all came about, in the beginning. My poor father was a great poet; there is no manner of doubt to be entertained in the matter, and the critics of Shiraz will all corroborate my statement. But, as in the case of many of our most exquisite singers of an older day, Fame came not to his hand during his lifetime; the jewelled bird preferred to perch among the bowers of Paradise, eating sugar from the lips of Jami and Hatifi. My father was of a warlike and noble mind; the battle-chants and historical romances which he composed are among the most vivid and spirited of which our land can boast. A goldsmith of Jerusalem, himself a poet of no mean attainment, said openly in the bazaars and market places of Shiraz that my father made songs to ring with a rare and spicy music evoked from seemingly casual words. Another poet and critic of this city

compared my father's work to glittering tapestries and clear-voiced bells. It was very gratifying, but my father was not content with all this praise. He wished, in short, to be a king. You will observe that I have not inherited his tastes in this respect; I am more like my mother. She experienced great terror as a child in witnessing the massacres of Mahmud; the effect upon my father of these scenes of horror was very different; though but a babe in arms his anger and holy indignation knew no bounds, but my mother's infant soul was deeply scarred by fear, and she has never since been able to view even the mildest form of assassination with any degree of composure. She was quite convinced that any effort on my father's part to regain the throne would result in his immediate murder; I have no hesitancy in accepting her opinion.

"My poor father pined and grieved for danger; his poetry became increasingly superb and bloody, but the pecuniary gain was small, and in spite of the warm encouragement of the before-mentioned critics and fellow-craftsmen, he faded away and died, in the belief that his honours would never become commensurate with his achievements. But prior to his sad demise, he had left strict directions as to my education, and the bitterness of his mind and heart caused him to expressly forbid me to learn or practice any of the fine arts. I could not be a poet; no more could I seek relief for my overflowing soul in the pipes and strings of dulcimer and lute; painting and the art of illuminating and engrossing manuscripts was to remain a closed book to me, a book whose exquisite cover and filagree clasps caused me the most excruciating longing.

Sculpture, even ceramics, the trades of the gold and silver smith, the architects' magnificent skill in calling airy towers to life in the sky, all these were denied me. My father had forgotten nothing. I was in despair; my health and spirits suffered from this enforced deprivation; my dear mother was at her wit's end.

"Upon how small and seemingly unimportant an event the entire happiness of a lifetime may depend!" he continued with fervent interest in his own story. "Has that reflection ever occurred to you, Father O'Donnell, or is it but the fantastic whimsy of a poet's son?"

"It has, and 'tis not," replied Father O'Donnell with pleasant brevity. "Go on with your story, my lad. We'll soon be reaching the elephants' ears."

"It was the morning of my twelfth birthday," Abbas pronounced solemnly, "a gleaming day in mid-most June, when the heavens seemed God's own countenance smiling upon his children. I ran about the kitchen, somewhat sad at heart, but very hungry, for my dear mother had been so busily occupied in the preparation of a vanilla birthday-cake and a strawberry sherbet for my supper, destined to be shared with several young Haidari cousins, that she had forgotten to give me any breakfast. I skipped, I strolled, I pottered about the large airy kitchen with its earthen floor and rows of turquoise-coloured pots and copper pans. I ate a raisin here and a morsel of citron there, and still I was starving, but of course respect and courtesy forbade me to make my dear mother aware of her innocent omission of our morning meal."



"You must have been an uncommonly polite child," said Father O'Donnell. The prince shook his head slightly in deprecation of a statement with which he evidently agreed.

"At last I possessed myself of a crust of stale bread, and a bit of cheese; these were deposited within a little pink wooden box, decorated with brightly burnished wire, which lay in a remote corner of the room. I have since come to a realisation of the distressing fact that this was none other than a mouse-trap, and the knowledge has caused me qualms, but at least I have no cause to think that it had ever contained a mouse. The thing was conspicuously new and shining, and my dear mother's absent habit of mind makes it practically certain that she had forgotten to set it."

"There should be a lesson in all this, if only we were clever enough to discover it," said Father O'Donnell. "It sounds like the beginning of a moral tale out of a French primer. But proceed, my prince."

"Just as I was biting into this dry fodder," the youth went on in growing excitement, "my dear mother spied me, and rushed upon me with cries of mingled pity and terror. Clutching with both hands at her luxuriant curls, her still girlish face flushed by the exertions of cookery, she looked like a moss rosebud in a fit of hysterics, the resemblance to this flower being heightened by the fact that all this pretty hair was dyed a brilliant emerald green, setting off her pink cheeks and hazel eyes to much advantage. My mother was very pious, you must know, in those days; she certainly would not have conversed with a Christian with the toleration which

she now bestows upon you. The tradition that Hezret-i-Fatima, the wife of the Prophet, will tear out by the roots every white hair she sees upon a woman's head was accepted by most Persian ladies of the past generation. My poor father's death had been a great sorrow to my dear mother; one white hair shone henceforward among the clustering brown locks which had always been the admiration of our small circle of friends. 'Little gazelle, do not dye that fawn-coloured fur of yours,' my grandmother entreated. 'You can easily pluck out this one white hair without the assistance of the severe Fatima; I shall cherish you so that no other will appear until you are yourself a grandmother.' But my dear mother was firm; she felt it in the nature of a religious observance and a tribute to my poor father's memory, and beside, she had always wanted to have green hair. It was really very becoming, and lightened the effect of her heavy mourning most charmingly."

"Your mother is a charming woman, indeed," said Father O'Donnell. The prince bowed as if he thought the remark had come better from his own lips than that of his friend. He had a very royal manner.

"Presently, after she had snatched the bread and cheese from my hands and thrown them out of the window to rejoice the hearts of the nightingales, she gave me a saucer full of candied rose-leaves; then perceiving that my disappointment was still keen though admirably controlled, she exclaimed that though she couldn't in the least remember what in the Prophet's Paradise we had breakfasted upon, she was sure it must have been something flimsy

and unsustaining, as she herself was hungry and I was nothing but a pair of large eyes staring at the saucepans upon the stove. Presently she snatched from the stove a small skillet, in which about a cupful of chicken broth was already bubbling pleasantly, and with all the ardour of maternal love and her own impulsive nature she added thereto a lump of fresh butter, a few sprigs of saffron, and a pinch of those dried herbs, aromatic and appetising, which are yearly gathered upon the slopes of Mount Sinai and sold to religious housewives throughout the East. Not content with these consoling activities, which were already causing me the most ecstatic pangs of hope, she proceeded to lift the cover from well-nigh every saucepan simmering above the fire, thereby releasing vapours of amazing fragrance while she deftly ladled a spoonful of this and a morsel of that into the fortunate skillet.

“I stood spellbound, swaying a little in a species of etherial intoxication as the delicate fumes mounted to my brain. Had the outcome been much longer delayed, I should assuredly have swooned; through a haze of thin steam I saw her flourishing bright cannisters of salt and pungent peppercorns. Then I was drawn gently to the round blue table under the rose-veiled casement. I sat down; my mother thrust a silver spoon into my hand, and placed before me a simple red earthen bowl, long associated in my mind with milk and rice and similar innocencies of childhood. Now all was changed; before my face wavered an incense cloud the like of which I had never smelt. No terrestrial porridge could produce such perfume, worthy of the Prophet’s Paradise, nor have I ever understood by what

divine chance my mother's careless touch had created such beauty. Laugh, my friend, if you will, but I tell you that authentic beauty rose in spiritual exhalation from that earthen bowl, even as the goddess rose from the Grecian wave. Do you believe me?" His voice trembled perceptibly.

"I believe you, my boy," said Father O'Donnell kindly. He was not smiling; the prince thought his mouth was rather grimly set for that of a sympathetic listener.

"Of course I realise," the royal youth continued stubbornly, "that my extreme hunger would have rendered any food savoury at the moment, but after making all due allowance for the weakness of my flesh, I still maintain that the scented smoke which ravished my senses fed a famine far higher than any I had before experienced. No perfume expressed from the white or yellow jasmine, no double-distilled rose-water of Fajhum, nor sugar of violets, no musk nor ambergris, could rival it in purity and distinction. In that instant, and without tasting the inspired concoction, I decided to dedicate my life to the art of cookery. My poor father, in his poet's ignorance of the world, had never thought to forbid my entering the temple of art through that particular portal; I was free to follow what I now perceived to be the way of my dreams. I sat long and silently in front of the blue table, now become an altar to all loveliness. I did not touch the food; as it congealed and became unsightly I gently closed my eyes and motioned to my mother to remove the dish.

"She was in despair; her solicitude leaped to the conclusion that I was ill, nor could my pale and

exalted looks serve to dispel so natural an illusion. She was, after all, a woman; she could not understand the miraculous radiance upon my brow, my distracted speech, and the appalling solemnity of my eyes. She wept, and though I strove to comfort her, my efforts were in vain.

“The remainder of the day passed like a tranquil and beatific trance. I remember lying in my narrow white bed between the sandal-wood scented sheets, watching a pallid sky chequered by fantastic patterns of quince and apple blossoms; I remember thinking that their April fragrance, enchanting and elusive, could be captured and enhanced in the jellied essences, coloured like roses or cloudy amber, which their fruit might yet yield to my hand. I remember the clamorous voices of my Haidari cousins on the little lawn below my window, and my mother’s pretty pitying face as she brought me rice and milk instead of the festal sherbet and sweetmeats. And I remember saying to her, a bit impatiently I fear, ‘Ah, mother, with a hint of nutmeg and a suspicion of orange flower water, this might be made quite palatable!’ Strange, beautiful, unreal hours—dreams and mysteries—mysteries and dreams. Though it is full seven years ago, my friend, I remember; but how I remember!”

His soliloquy subsided in his throat with something akin to a sob; Father O'Donnell frankly envied him his capacity for pleasurable melancholy.

“As you know,” the boy said proudly, “there is something ascetic in my spirit; I have never cared very deeply about the actual taste of my work. Let its essential odour satisfy my mind and senses, and I am content. I rarely judge by the grosser



test of actual gustation, and then only when the higher faculty has warned me that an element is lacking or a flavour overstressed. For myself, a handful of dried beans, a few lentils, a spare crust of bread, these suffice. Wine—ah, that is different! I think I see you smile, and yet you must know that I am speaking the truth. I admit that my affection for the juices of the grape and pomegranate is a shame and a sorrow to me, but wine in its very nature is less mundane than food; the madness of its fumes is etherial though evil. But, in cooking, to create a masterpiece for the nose alone—that is exquisite, that is Art!”

“’Tis your nose that’s bigger than your stomach, then,” remarked the older man amiably. The prince looked puzzled; with one hand he drew tighter the varnished belt encircling his wasp waist; with the other he casually caressed the bridge of his small straight nose.

A silence fell between the two friends, keeping pace with the soft descent of darkness and dew which was turning the red rose black and the white rose moon-coloured. The moon herself was no more than a phosphorescent feather among the oak leaves.



## 2. THE BYZANTINE IMAGE



AT length Father O'Donnell drew forth from beneath his vast and enveloping mantle a minute lantern of the finest Persian workmanship, struck light with all the violence of superb and unnecessary muscular power, and deposited the thing, glowing like a handful of gems, upon the seat beside him. Its top was a clear mosaic of rainbow sparks; its four sides stained the flame within to pink or amber, emerald or blue. By this fantastic illumination he prepared to open a small breviary of incredible age and shabbiness, but before he had adjusted its crumpled pages to his satisfaction, the prince interrupted him.

"When may I see the Virgin?" he inquired timidly.

Father O'Donnell sighed, and regarded the youth with a satirical lift of his brows, "Never, in this world, unless a miracle is vouchsafed you," he said conclusively.

The prince frowned angrily, but bit his lip into an ingratiating smile before answering. "As you are well aware, I only refer, and that with the utmost deference, to the Byzantine image," he murmured.

"Ah, you mean the little ivory picture of Our Lady that I found in the new bazaar this morning! Or perhaps it's more of a statue than a picture, only I couldn't say, because of my profound ignorance

of the seven arts, and all else under heaven. However, I'm convinced at least of this much," he went on in a low and rapid articulation which the prince experienced great difficulty in following, "the work is of the fifth century, or maybe just possibly of the early part of the sixth, executed I should judge by a Greek or Syrian of the utmost skill, for though the general treatment of the figure is like all Byzantine *bas-relief* somewhat flat and conventionalised, the masterly modelling of the hands and arms, carved quite free of the background, and the exquisite though impersonal beauty of the face betray a superlative artist. I lean towards the theory of Syrian workmanship when I remember the great angel of the balanced pinions and the intent countenance which I once beheld in the shop of a Syrian carver in Constantinople, but there's this to be said for the Greek, that the hair and the halo are of purest gold, and what's that but the true chryselephantine . . ."

He paused for a reply, and receiving none, continued with evident interest in his own words, "'Tis the central portion of a small triptych; the marks of hinges are plainly visible upon the back of the panel."

"Am I not to be accorded the privilege of beholding this marvel?" Mirza Abbas inquired with gentle acerbity. "Do you perhaps consider me too bloody a paynim for such an honour?"

"By no means, dear boy," said the priest pleasantly. "Look, now, and see what a treasure it is I've had the luck to discover."

From the inner recesses of his robe he produced an oblong package of worn black brocade; this he

unfolded slowly and with the most meticulous care, until at last its contents lay upon his broad palm exposed to the prince's avid gaze. The object thus displayed was indeed beautiful; the boy caught his breath and clenched his hands in excitement as the yellow lantern light fell clear upon the image.

The ivory panel was perhaps six inches long and slightly more than half as wide; as Father O'Donnell held it the figure of Our Lady appeared to be recumbent yet alive, lifting little hands which implored rather than blessed. The delicately cut face, no larger than the prince's finger-nail, looked innocent and vaguely troubled; shallow scallops of gold hair framed it beneath the folds of the ivory mantle; behind the head were spiked rays of gold. The lantern's amber glass made the ivory itself only a paler gold.

The prince turned the lantern until the image was drenched in green light. "See, she is drowned," he said sadly, "she has returned to the sea; she has taken to herself its cold colour, she is asleep in the sea."

He turned the lantern again. "But no, she ascends to the Seventh Heaven; she floats in its azure space; her wings are folded, yet she flies in Heaven."

The priest laid his hand upon the boy's wrist; he was frowning. "You are a curious young idolator, and I doubt that I'll ever make a Christian of you. Give over your Magian lantern play; you are irreverent." He reached for the lantern, but the prince was too quick for him; in a flash the ivory seemed to melt into human flesh in auroral light from the rose-coloured glass set in the lantern's fourth side.

The prince threw back his head and laughed joyfully; the image smiled at him. "Ah, behold your miracle!" he cried. "She lives, she breathes, she is made mortal before my eyes. She is a woman who wakes in the dawn and smiles in the flush of the dawn; she is a woman who smiles into the face of her beloved!"

Father O'Donnell was very angry. With the calm of undisputed strength he removed the lantern from the prince's grasp and cast it, extinguished and shattered, far down the slope of the lawn. Then he painstakingly returned the panel to its wrappings of black brocade. His eyes were inexorable.

"With God's help, I shall hold that sacred object hidden from your impious gaze forever," he said sternly. "It was my intention to give it to you on that auspicious day when you were actually received into the Church; now I fear that your soul is lost beyond my power to save it; I believe you are mad." There were tears in his indignant eyes; the prince was weeping openly and at his feet.

He placed his brown hand on the boy's shoulder; he was more moved than he cared to admit. "There, take heart!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I was too rough with you, poor lad; there's more silliness than sin in you, any day; that's plain enough to be seen. We must be patient with each other; if you'll ask Our Lady's pardon, I'll gladly ask yours for roaring at you like a wild bull, and you bleating like a sheep for penitence."

The prince looked up gratefully at his preceptor; his expression was angelic. "You have forgiven me, then? You will not visit your anger upon me any longer?"



Father O'Donnell looked down at him quizzically. The boy knelt in the dewy grass, knelt upon one knee in the attitude affected by mediæval pages, with a conscious grace reflected in the pathetic glances of his long-lashed eyes. There was little of the true penitent in his look, but much of the child and something, even, of the sentimental spaniel; the priest's heart was melted.

"You know I'm not the only one who has to forgive you, Abbas," he pronounced at last in a subdued voice. "You are strangely perverse at times, but it's my duty to remember that you're a Persian and a poet; I can't expect you to behave as yet like the good stupid little Belgians of Bruges. I think I may safely promise you, after all, that if you will but attend to your studies you'll have what you wish."

"The Byzantine image!" cried the prince with happy animation.

Father O'Donnell jerked him roughly to his feet and shook him vigorously. "No!" he thundered. "Never while I live! Faith was what I meant, and decent behaviour, and purity of mind!" For the first time his national accent was plainly audible in these emphatic words. "Are you not forever saying that you want to be a Christian, that you must be a Christian, that you'll make any sacrifice if only you can be a Christian?"

"And a Jesuit," the prince amended carefully.

"Yes, that's what you've got at the back of your head all the time! A Jesuit! For all it conveys to you, it might as well be a Mullah or a Mage—'tis simply your precious idea of personal aggrandisement. Have you any notion, my lad, of what it

would mean? Poverty—Chastity—Obedience—the Sacrifice of the Intellect!” He finished on a note of withering scorn.

The prince drooped slightly, but did not wither. “I have rejected the doctrines of Sufi,” he said with dignity, “I have dabbled in the Magian mysteries of Zoroaster; I have investigated the teachings of Buddha and Confucius. Thanks to your good offices, I am not wholly ignorant of the superstitions of the Greeks, or the cynical pretences of the Romans. I have concluded, not that I wish to become a Christian, but that I have already attained that state. Touching the other matter, I beg you not to disturb yourself with doubts and indignations. I am poor”—he lifted his head—“I am chaste”—he folded his hands—“I am obedient”—he inclined his brow with an immense haughtiness, raising it to exclaim—“and I am willing to sacrifice my intellect to God!”

“Stupendous!” replied the priest with irritating urbanity. “But I fear you’ll have to be content with becoming a mere Christian; had I been able to spirit you into some retreat five years ago, when first you fell into my hands, your ambitions might have been realised, for you were at that date exactly fourteen years old, the proper age for a novice. But Persia does not boast a Saint Omer, and even had you been in Europe, the colleges and houses were one by one closing in the most tragic confusion. I have told you of my heart-breaking departure from Spain, and the incredible gloom of my existence in Corsica, where for a brief but dreadful period I lodged, for my sins, in the house of the most detestable people I have ever met, a young

married couple called Buonaparte. The woman especially was to be condemned as a termagant and a scold; she had one little boy, Giuseppe, the object of my sincerest pity; I wonder if she ever bore another child to beat and starve."

"I do not know and I do not care," said the prince crossly. "Beside, you have told me all this before. I like better to hear of your journey to the East, of your sanguinary adventures and miraculous escapes, and of the success of your secret mission to the Caliph of Baghdad. Ah, but you were superb . . ." and he clapped his hands in admiring delight.

"I did not wholly fail to deserve the confidence with which my superiors had honoured me." Father O'Donnell spoke with becoming modesty; absently he fingered his stained and ragged robe. "I have never regretted my choice, for I was, indeed, by a curious combination of circumstances, left free to choose between the luxury of Frederick's court and this outlandish exile. In the case of the illustrious Frederick, the Society has been singularly fortunate; more fortunate than the world suspects. You know, of course . . ." He checked himself, and continued thoughtfully, "I realised that my humble talents were better fitted to overcome the barbarous Mahound than the more attenuated Anti-Christ of Sans Souci. Though for that matter, you have perhaps heard that Voltaire . . ." Again he checked himself, to murmur under his breath, "But he, to be sure, was converted by a Dominican!"

"And the image, what will you do with it now?" the prince ventured timidly. He dreaded a renewal of his friend's unaccountable anger, but curiosity

overcame his fear. To his vast relief, the priest answered with perfect mildness.

"I shall not keep it," he said without regret. "I have no right to possess so beautiful a work of art, rendered trebly valuable by its sacred nature and extreme antiquity. Now that you have shown yourself unfit to be its custodian"—the prince shuddered and closed his eyes in mingled remorse and cupidity—"I shall, if possible, send it by the hand of a trusted messenger to one of my friends in Europe, one who will revere it and treasure it always. I have in mind, as possible recipients of this gift, an elderly scholar in Madrid, a very great lady in Paris, and a poor widow in Ireland. I have not yet decided among the three."

He was silent, seeming to meditate. The prince nodded his smooth dark head in mournful acquiescence; within his head were a thousand plans for discovering the identity of the messenger and having him waylaid and robbed; he hoped that there would be no necessity for resorting to murder. Father O'Donnell knew precisely what the boy was thinking; he sighed, and when he spoke again his voice was gently minatory.

"Your possessive instinct is over-strong, my dear child," he said. "Oh, jerk your eyebrows and shrug your shoulders if you please, but it's true, all the same, and you should study to eradicate the fault, which will bring you nothing but unhappiness. Of course it's largely the result of your mother's unwisdom in anticipating your every wish, but nevertheless I think you are somewhat to blame in the matter. Observe the absurdity of your aspiring to become one of the Clerks Regulars of the Society

of Jesus, when you are the owner of no less than fifty-one pairs of morocco slippers, four dozen shirts of the finest embroidered cotton, and twenty-seven tunics of Cashmere wool."

"My mother—" began the prince perfidiously, but the other man paid no heed to the interruption.

"While I"—he went on, indicating several of the more conspicuous patches upon his disreputable robe—"while I, having lost my habit the very night I landed at Bushire, am thankful enough for this rough Arabian cape, the harsh texture of which would flay you alive like the unlucky victim of Apollo's wrath were it ever to come in contact with your oiled and pampered limbs. I believe it belonged to a celebrated horse-thief," he added, reflectively enlarging a ragged hole.

"So its appearance would certainly indicate." Mirza Abbas sniffed disdainfully, as if offended in another sense than sight. His delicate nostrils quivered.

"As for my breviary," the priest said, flicking open the shabby pages with affectionate care, "I have really no right to that, either, having grown unduly fond of the book. Only, I believe after all that the difficulty of securing another, in Shiraz, justifies me in retaining this one. I hope I am not wrong in this opinion." It was clear that he doted upon the thing.

"You could easily have it copied in the Bazaar," the prince suggested spitefully. "I know of a number of excellent penmen who would gladly undertake such a commission for a small sum, even enriching the volume with illuminations in colour and gold leaf, and binding it in embossed leather. I



will take the book to the Bazaar to-morrow." He extended his slim hand.

"No," said Father O'Donnell with finality, "I cannot afford gold leaf." He hid the breviary in the wide sleeve of his Arabian cloak.

The crescent plume that lit the deepening sky floated softly down until it hung among the heavy-headed roses; the ground absorbed its unsubstantiality like rain. The night was dark, yet trees and flowers were translucent as black glass to the starlight; they glittered like black glass. Waves of pure sweetness flowed strangely, unhastened by any wind, from the white roses and the warmer wine-coloured roses, around the two figures on the marble bench, who now sat with all the immobility of marble in the centre of this softly stirring obscurity. The cold, aqueous scent of pond-lilies mounted like mist from the fish-ponds of Kerim Khan.

Across this tranquillity there suddenly flashed the startling trail of a light, somewhat shrill voice, like a small rocket of sound scattering vivacious and unnecessary notes upon the air. The prince jumped in his seat.

"Abbas, my child!" called the voice in cultivated Persian accents; "Abbas, I have been searching for you high and low; where are you hiding yourself, my little golden hawk?"

"It is my mother!" exclaimed the prince in surprise. "What can have brought her into the garden at this hour? Her voice betrays considerable agitation; I trust nothing untoward has taken place." And he began to tremble a little, presumably from excitement.

A plump but agile figure became visible, at this

instant, ascending the slope with remarkable speed considering the circumstance of its being swaddled from top to toe in a large dark cloak. As the figure approached, two eye-holes glittered in the sombre material covering its face; its voice repeated "Abbas, Abbas, answer me at once!" and both men rose simultaneously from the marble bench.

"I am here, mother; is anything the matter?" Abbas inquired anxiously in his native tongue. Then relapsing once more into English, he added. "Father O'Donnell is with me, but from him we have no secrets."

"No?" said the lady politely, but with a rising inflection; her English was remarkably correct. "Good evening, Isauvi; I trust that my son has not been sitting long upon this chilly stone seat, for the night air at this season of the year is particularly dangerous, and I observe his tunic upon the grass." She stooped to recover the tunic, at the same moment attempting to test the degree of moisture which had so far penetrated the soles of the prince's slippers. He eluded her with a plaintive cry, only suffering her to drape the tunic across his shoulders.

Father O'Donnell bowed with grave courtesy. "Good evening, madam," he replied. "I think the boy has come to no irreparable harm."

"You are aware how easily he catches cold—" began the fond parent, but her son interrupted her with an agonised plea for information concerning her errand.

"Very well," she said resignedly. "I was coming to that in good time. I have a strange piece of news for you. Some of the Banou's atrocious

Turcoman relatives have captured a young Circassian girl of great beauty; she appears, however, upon the point of death, and pending the outcome of her present state of insensibility, she has been placed in my care. The Banou does not wish to alarm or incommode the other occupants of the harem while there remains the slightest fear that this person will turn into a corpse before morning; the women do not like corpses, even pretty ones. Meanwhile, my dear," she addressed her son respectfully, "if it would not too much trouble your sensitive spirit, I should like to consult you in the matter of diet. The poor girl is shockingly emaciated; we must see what we can do."

"Perhaps a dish of young lamb *à la crème*, or sweetbreads stewed in milk of almonds—" suggested the prince hopefully, his whole mobile countenance alight with interest.

"But no, my child; nothing so elaborate will be advisable at present. Rather, if I may venture to counsel your admirable skill, I should prefer the patient to drink a little of your famous saffron broth, with a wafer baked in the silver oven. I leave it entirely to you, of course—but—" it was evident that she did no such thing; the prince nodded in filial assent.

"First, we should make sure that the vital spark has not escaped from the body of this unhappy creature," the voice of Father O'Donnell, at its most solemn depth, reminded them. "It is possible, even, that she may be in need of spiritual succour at my hands."

"Surely, Isauvi, you do not suspect this unfortunate of being a Christian?" The little lady was

sincerely shocked; within the eye-holes her bright eyes rolled in alarm. "Oh, that cannot be, I assure you! She is beautiful, she is richly dressed, she has all the marks of high birth and breeding!" The prince's mother had her inherited prejudices, but she was a kind woman at heart, and at a warning glance from her son she concealed her horror with commendable speed.

"Let us all proceed together to my dwelling," the royal youth said, graciously linking his arm in that of the priest. "Mother, if you will permit me to escort you—" and he possessed himself of her arm also. Father O'Donnell and the Persian gentlewoman eyed each other, across his slender form, with the mutual confidence of a spoiled, aristocratic Oriental cat and a noble but impatient Irish wolfhound. Abbas was perfectly happy.

Jennifer lay upon a large divan in the principal apartment of the little house. The couch was heaped to a luxurious depth with cushions of blue and silver, purple and velvet black. Above her, a round silver lamp, bright as a mirror and filled with fragrant oil, shed its moonlight radiance upon her motionless figure. The room, hung with long shadows and vaulted with incense-smoke, had the look of a *chapelle ardente*. The sleeping child was attired in a thick shawl of cream-coloured Chuddah wool; a fine veil, its white silk traced delicately with a pattern of gold threads, covered her from head to foot. Her face was invisible; her thin hands, flung to the right and the left of her body, moulded the silk perceptibly.

To the three persons entering the room she appeared already dead. A pretty marriageable girl

sadly cut off in her youth, thought the lady. A white rose fallen to mortality, thought the prince. A slaughtered innocent, thought Father O'Donnell, more intensely. His energetic stride outstripped the others: before either could protest, he had torn the veil from Jennifer's face and flung it upon the tiled floor. Her lovely little face lay revealed, framed in shallow scallops of gold hair below the ivory folds of the shawl. She looked innocent and vaguely troubled. As Father O'Donnell bent over the couch, her lips stirred and she lifted her hands imploringly.

"The Byzantine image!" whispered the boy; he fell upon his knees and covered his eyes with his hands.

While his mother sprinkled the girl's brow with rose-water, Abbas remained kneeling, crouched at the foot of the divan; he was trembling uncontrollably. Father O'Donnell, re-entering the room with a small gold-speckled glass of some potent liquor, patted him kindly on his shaking shoulder, but he paid no heed. A terrible emotion, seemingly extraneous to himself, and yet strong as demoniac possession, convulsed his body and soul to an agony such pampered flesh and spirit could ill support. As Jennifer opened her large distracted eyes, the prince raised his own for an instant and looked her full in the face; then his eyelids closed, and he fell forward with his forehead against the foot of the couch and his arms hanging helplessly, like those of a broken marionette; the jewelled bangles on his wrists tinkled like a flight of little bells.

In response to the mother's wild cry of alarm, Father O'Donnell lifted the boy from the floor, and



found him to be, if not unconscious, yet apparently dazed and deprived of the power of speech. Dragging a few large cushions from the couch, he threw them into a corner and deposited Abbas upon their comfortable thickness, where he lay supine, his head supported by a gigantic pillow of black velvet, and his eyes immovably fixed upon the face of the exquisite creature recumbent upon the couch. Even the brandy which the priest poured liberally down his throat did no more than elicit a glance of grateful recognition; of his mother's anxious presence he appeared completely unaware.

Presently, by some unaccountable chance, connected perhaps with the search for further restoratives, the enamoured boy found himself alone with his divinity. Instantly assuming a more dignified posture, and holding his head proudly erect, he fixed the girl with a brilliant yet dreaming glance, and inquired in poetic Persian as to the precise identity of the daughter of a *peri*, the celestial vision in ivory and gold, the jasmine-flower of immaculate sweetness, who had honoured his house by her presence. Receiving no reply, he addressed her as *Venus Anadyomene* in very fair Greek, and was proceeding to employ the Latin tongue, of which he knew little save prayers and holy exercises, when her gentle voice preserved him from blasphemy by murmuring weakly, "Where am I?"

At these unmistakable English words the prince's amazement knew no bounds. "Who are you, little beloved?" he cried breathlessly. Her long look of pitying and pathetic kindness calmed his extreme agitation like a cool hand laid across the fever of his eyes.

"I am a young English widow," she said with touching dignity. Her hands and eyelids fluttered feebly, but she contrived to assume a manner of mild and courteous composure, at once gentle and aloof. "As such I hope to command the chivalrous respect of all true gentlemen."

"And I am a disinherited prince," said Abbas, profoundly impressed, yet happy to be able to counter with so romantic a statement, "as such I hope to deserve your confidence and to serve you faithfully forever."

Jennifer found him charming, though her feeling for foreign royalty was tempered by a quiet scorn. "I am the daughter of a Scottish peer," she added a little haughtily.

"The daughter of a Scottish peri!" the prince repeated after her. He was completely enchanted, floating in a glamorous daze through regions of forbidden sorceries. "Are you one of the Sidhe?" he inquired with respect.

"No, I am one of the Lorns," said Jennifer quite simply. "One of the Lorns of Carterhaugh. My mother was a Cleverly-Neville, and"—she paused, but concluded that she owed it to herself, since the boy was plainly a prince—"I am a descendant of Tamburlaine the Great."

The lad was electrified; the statement placed a crown upon the glittering eminence which her words were rapidly building in his imagination, a species of Moorish castle in Spain executed in the material of dreams; the spun-sugar palace of his innermost ideal, spangled with candied violets and silver comfits. Approaching Jennifer with infinite awe, he set his lips to her little hand. "Then I am indeed the

fortunate inheritor of your friendship!" he cried, and he explained very clearly to Jennifer the legend of the famous meeting at Ardebil between their renowned forbears; she on her part soon made the prince acquainted with the romantic history of Lady Helena Lorn and her noble Persian husband. An immediate bond was thus created between the two sentimental children; Father O'Donnell and the princess, upon returning to the room, observed nothing but the shyest and most demure looks in the faces of the young people, but the seeds of a profound affection had already been planted in the bosom of each.



### 3. ROSE-WATER OF FAJHUM



HE Princess Shekerleb, for such was the charming Turkish name of the prince's mother, had removed her disguising outer garment, for though she was mentally incapable of comprehending Father O'Donnell's character of Christian priest, she was fully persuaded that he was not exactly a man, and so felt no embarrassment in unveiling her face before him. He, on his part, did not often encourage, save in those cases where diplomacy demanded, the curious Mohammedan prejudices of his potential flock in Shiraz. He knew precisely with what degree of speed the enthusiastic little lady would follow her adored son into the Church; meanwhile he humoured her, and avoided treading on the toes of her slippers even when she left them outside the Mosque.

Princess Shekerleb was the daughter of a Turkish lady; her father had been a Shirazi of excellent but impoverished family, with Turkish affiliations. Her upbringing had been strictly orthodox; the green coiffure had been a direct compliment to the Prophet's fondness for that colour. But her growing boy had long since shamed her out of these opinions; under his guidance, she had become a devout Shi-ite, and her abundant hair was now as blue as indigo could make it. She was prettily attired in purple and gold, and Jennifer was immediately at-

tracted by her charming face and figure. [The poor girl felt that she had found an ally.

Strange to relate, such was indeed the truth, for Shekerleb, though possessing in full all the natural jealousies and misgivings of a devoted mother, was nevertheless of so romantic and indulgent a disposition that she was invariably moved by the sight of beauty in distress; furthermore, she could refuse her son nothing. She had not failed to note the prince's emotion, nor had her vivid imagination delayed in supplying both cause and cure for this phenomenon. While sincerely regretting the all-too-evident fact that her boy had fallen in love, she was not entirely averse to the idea that Abbas, rather than the reigning monarch, should enjoy this lovely and desirable bride.

"Elderly, bearded, and excessively-uxorious Kurdish goat!" she muttered indignantly in Persian, at the same time casting an appreciative glance at the fine countenance and graceful form of the reclining prince, who appeared to slumber.

Meanwhile she busied herself with a hundred small kindnesses in restoring Jennifer to consciousness and ameliorating her fatigue; wine, hot chicken broth with rice and raisins, and refreshing snow-chilled sherbet were prepared by her own hands and offered with many expressions of sympathy to her young guest, whose murmured gratitude was weak but continuous. The meal ended with a mutual embrace, and a few tears by way of seasoning.

After a somewhat prolonged absence, Father O'Donnell entered with an air of discouragement; his brow was grave, his lips compressed. "I can do nothing," he informed the princess. "The head



eunuch is our friend, but his efforts to persuade the Banou are quite unavailing. She repeats, with characteristic obstinacy, that her cousin Aslan Sultan, the Turcoman chief, captured this poor child for the especial benefit of Kerim Khan, who has been rather dull and moody of late, according to the gossip of the court. This unspeakable woman is apparently too old to dread the dominion of another favourite; she merely wishes to supply an ironic travesty of a toy to the monarch's second childhood. Our only hope lies in the fact that the Banou is willing, for the present, that the girl should remain in your care; she says that the degree of emaciation to which the poor creature has been reduced renders her repellent to the sight, and she bids you to lose no time in administering the most fattening diet that your son's skill can provide. It is long since I have seen a European lady, but I think that the extreme slenderness of our young friend is perhaps natural, as it is certainly pleasing and appropriate to her years."

Jennifer opened her eyes and gave him a look of intense gratitude, and then folded her hands upon her breast and composed her features to classic calm, lightened by an expression of great sweetness and resignation. She was still so sleepy that she had heard no word of this alarming conversation save the Banou's insult and the priest's kindly compliment.

"The Banou is a corpulent Turcoman, and has no conception of true Persian elegance," said the princess, complacently tightening the clasp of the jewelled girdle which encircled her trim figure. "I

consider this young lady to be a model of grace and breeding." She bowed to Jennifer, who nodded her head feebly in reply, "And what, my dear," continued Shekerleb, absent-mindedly continuing to speak English, "is your nationality, if I may ask? Are you a Circassian or a Georgian, or even, by any chance, a Greek? I have heard that the young Greek women of fashion are very beautiful," she added politely.

Jennifer smiled; she seemed to absorb the flattery while rejecting the suggestion. "I am a native of Devonshire," she replied with engaging simplicity.

"Holy Mother of—!" cried the priest in blank amazement.

"Allah! il Allah!" echoed the princess shrilly, naturally assuming, from his tone, that Devonshire must be some region of wild and terrifying wonders, like the abode of Eblis or the horrible mountain of Kaf. She stepped back from the couch in considerable alarm. "Where is this country, O'Donnell Baba?" she asked.

"It is a portion of England," the priest explained, "celebrated, I believe, for its luxuriant beauty, and especially for the superior quality of its cream and its roses."

"Celebrated, above all else, for the exceeding beauty of one white rose!" said the prince in an intense and thrilling whisper. He sat up and stared about him as if aroused from a profound trance.

His mother looked at him with a certain asperity brightening her hazel eyes. "If you are sufficiently recovered to speak, my son," she said with unwonted severity, "I suggest that you retire for the night;

you must be in need of rest. It is not suitable that you remain any longer in the same room with our guest."

Abbas appeared to be overcome by an access of fatigue; he lay back against the cushions and closed his eyes. "I think I will stay where I am for the present, mother," he answered. "I do not see any immediate necessity for going. Beside, I consider myself affianced to this lady; I shall marry her tomorrow, and remove her from all danger of indignity." His tone was final; he did not even trouble to open his eyes.

"Not so fast, my boy," Father O'Donnell warned him; at the same moment the plaintive voice of Jennifer was clearly audible from the couch.

"I cannot marry you, my dear prince," it said gently, "until the customary year has elapsed. I fear it is not in the best of taste to discuss such matters with so recent a widow as myself. My chief care at present," she explained with mild disapproval, "is to procure some suitable mourning. The costume I am wearing, I realise with pain, is shockingly inappropriate. Dear Gerald was always so scrupulous concerning such points of taste and etiquette; his judgment was perfect." Her eyes filled with tears; she wept quietly, but with an air of deep and hopeless melancholy.

Father O'Donnell stooped over her and took her fingers, white and limp as the scrap of lace handkerchief crumpled between them, in his hand. He addressed her in a firm voice which was nevertheless soft and reassuring. "Are you a member of the Church, my child?" he asked her.

Jennifer stopped crying, and looked up at him

with startled eyes; he thought he had never before seen so lovely or so pitiful a face.

"I am, of course," she informed him, more tranquil now that she had beheld the benignity of his intentions clear upon his ample brow. "Are you a priest?" This choice of words, the result not so much, perhaps, of the nuns' training as of the fact that the rector at Cleverly-Neville was a very High Anglican, with an extravagant wife and a wistful longing for celibacy, was the innocent cause of a misunderstanding which may have affected Jennifer's future to the brink of the grave and more mystically beyond. It did not occur to Father O'Donnell that she meant a priest of the Church of England; for her own part she had forgotten that any other church existed.

"Yes, my dear," he told her; she felt, suddenly, that he was her father. She liked him better than the rector, who had prepared her for confirmation, and considered her unforgivably feminine and slightly Evangelical. His wife had loved the girl; Jennifer wept anew, remembering the vivacious countenance of Mrs. Prothero framed in blue taffeta under a blonde lace veil.

Soon, however, she dried her eyes and looked about her; a glance, wan and sympathetic, passed between the prince and herself, then, with the prettiest deference, she addressed her words to the princess.

"You will marvel, Madam, at my presence in your country and more particularly at the strangeness of my appearance," she said humbly, unable to realise that her attire was infinitely more suited to her surroundings than the extreme of fashion

represented by a Parisian riding-habit and plumed *chapeau*, or even the coveted crêpe veil of her present desires. "I must explain the circumstances which brought me here, and also assure you that I am an English lady of good family, who presumes upon your hospitality only because her destitute condition renders her helpless. My parents are in England, my husband"—her eyes dilated with grief and horror—"has been most atrociously murdered by the same band of robbers which conveyed me to this city. He was sent as a special envoy from His Majesty's government in India to the court of Kerim Khan—in what tragic and untoward fashion do I now find myself at the precise destination to which our journey tended! Our party landed at the Port of Bushire, where the heads of the British Factory showed us every conceivable kindness, at the same time encouraging us to expect a like cordiality from the Khan, with whom they had always maintained the pleasantest relations. They said much of his intelligent interest in commerce and agriculture, and of his sincere regard for our own great and enlightened civilisation. It was with the happiest and most fervent hopes that we set forth for Shiraz."

She ceased, and lying back among the pillows allowed a few quiet tears to trickle along the ivory of her smooth thin cheeks; her hair had fallen in light dishevelment across her brow, and she tossed it back with a faintly hysteric gesture before continuing her narrative.

"During the first days of the journey gaiety and good humour prevailed; my husband and I were mounted upon horses, while our servants and guides



rode excellent mules; a large number of these useful animals carried the impedimenta of travel so that we lacked for nothing, and were exceedingly comfortable and contented. My dear husband was a superb horseman; his knowledge of history was amazing, and his fund of anecdote inexhaustible. As a travelling companion, and indeed in every other relation of life"—she explained with a loyal little sob—"he was the most superior person whom it has ever been my privilege to know."

"Your husband must have been a great Gaiour lord," said Shekerleb consolingly. "It is always an honour to have been married to a superior husband!" and she sighed without bitterness.

"Her father is the Emperor of Scotland, and her mother is a peri—" began Abbas, but the princess silenced him with a wave of her hand; she was well accustomed to the extravagance of her son's imagination.

"But as we approached the lofty and difficult mountain passes which lie to the south of Shiraz," Jennifer went on unheeding, with faster speech and lightning-flashes of excitement from her expanding eyes, "as we drew near to these dangerous and depressing regions we became aware of a certain uneasiness among the servants; inquiries resulted in the disclosure of the fact that a famous band of outlaws, the terror of the entire countryside, was known to be lying in wait for us, impregvably entrenched within the highest pass of all. My husband's indignation knew no bounds, but, with characteristic British courage, he determined to press onward. I own to a far lesser fortitude; in fine, I was well-nigh distracted with fear. The re-

assurances of my dear Gerald and the ministrations of my faithful maid somewhat restored my spirits, but when, upon a dark and thunderous evening, made yet more sinister by a crimson sunset and the icy portent of extreme cold, we prepared to ascend this pass prior to pitching our camp in the adjoining valley, I found myself a prey to the gloomiest forebodings.

"Alas, my worst fears were but too soon to be realised!" she continued, the shaken eloquence of her voice rising tremulously above the sympathetic comments of all three listeners. "Scarcely had we traversed the little plateau which lay below the pass itself, and observed those grim pinnacles of calcined stone closing down on us like the jaws of some mythological monster, than we were made aware, by a very bedlam of the fiercest cries and imprecations, of the sudden advance from above of a great company of barbarians, clad in rude cloaks and wearing sheep-skin caps; one and all were armed to the teeth. A shower of arrows fell about our heads, while our small party huddled together in the utmost consternation and dismay. Only my husband, as ever heroic and composed, rode to meet the murderous horde."

Jennifer flung her arm across her face and shuddered violently; then a natural and reviving pride strengthened her voice to firmness.

"Never, while the breath of life animates my bosom, shall I forget the magnificent spectacle of his solitary figure, tall and straight as a pine tree, riding forward alone to the combat. Perhaps a certain slight obstinacy in his otherwise quite perfect disposition accounted for the apparent fool-

hardiness of the undertaking; perhaps scorn of our cowardly servitors drove him to desperation. For my own part, I am convinced that a noble self-confidence supported him in the belief that he could vanquish these miscreants single-handed. He was attired in white linen, as was his invariable custom when travelling, but over this he wore, owing to the unseasonable cold, a mantle of rough white wool, which, if it somewhat impeded his movements, added much to his impressive appearance. He rode a splendid snow-white Arabian steed; he was armed only with a pair of pistols and a malacca cane."

"A sword-stick was it, now?" asked Father O'Donnell with cordial interest. Jennifer shook her head.

"It was merely a silver-headed malacca cane," she said distinctly. "He had the habit of strolling beside his horse, sometimes for miles at a time; he was an indefatigable walker. The cane he found useful for this form of exercise, and for keeping order among the servants." She paused, allowing the others to digest their surprise; she looked very proud.

"He assumed his station upon a large rock which lay athwart the path, reining in his horse with one hand; the other held his pistol. As the savages surrounded him, he emptied his weapon into their midst, and flung it squarely at the head of their chief, whom it momentarily stunned. The villain fell crashing to the ground, while his followers renewed their savage warfare on every side. My husband calmly took the other pistol from his belt, and discharged it at very close range, in the convulsed and hideous faces of his enemies; a number

of lifeless bodies soon strewed the rocks at his feet. Then, with the most intrepid composure, he lifted the cane in ironical salute, and laid about him, like a fencer, with astonishing grace and skill. The wretches were so far amazed by this exhibition of courage that they actually drew back a few paces, watching him with awestruck looks and muttered imprecations. 'The mad Giaour is wearing the invisible armour of Eblis!' they cried, and forthwith began to pray; some went so far as to kneel on the sharp stones in the very extremity of terror.

"My husband was indeed a figure of almost supernatural power; I was irresistibly reminded of Richard Cœur de Lion among the Paynim hosts, or of King Arthur withstanding the onslaught of his unhallowed foes. I dared to hope—as with what agonised fervour I prayed—that right would triumph, and a deserving Christian gentleman be accorded a miraculous escape from death. But no; it was not to be.

"At that moment the chief of the Turcomans awoke from his swoon; jumping to his feet, he loudly abused his men for their timidity, at the same time beating them unmercifully with his spear. Drawing his terrible long bow and fixing therein an arrow like a dagger, he let the deadly shaft fly straight at my husband, whom it struck squarely in the breast. Gerald swayed, as if with the impact of a blow, then, leaping lighting to the ground, he dismissed his horse to safety, and stood alone and unattended upon the summit of the rock. A screaming press of spears and darts was immediately loosed at his shining and uncovered head; he fell to earth pierced by twenty arrows."

"He sold his life dearly," said the priest with satisfaction. "He was a brave man; God rest his reckless spirit."

"They feared him even in death," Jennifer answered slowly. "They buried him then and there, on that black and solitary peak, weighing down his body with stones and rubble, and driving a stake through his heart."

"So, there is little more to tell," she went on; her voice was low and exhausted. "The rest of us were made prisoners; my dear and faithful maid, Sallie, nearly lost her life in attempting to defend me, but she was quickly bound and gagged and flung across her captor's saddle-bow. Mohammed, my husband's body-servant, too late repenting of his cowardice, made some efforts to save my person from such indignity; finally I was permitted to ride my own horse. This man was a Musselman, and by virtue of his green turban and grave bearded face, the robbers seemed to grant him a certain immunity from physical assault. He was an accomplished barber, and promised them, with the most abject expressions of respect towards their chief, a complete shaving of crowns as soon as their encampment should be reached.

"Our eyes were now blindfolded, and for upward of an hour we rode along steep and apparently winding paths; at the end of this time I was lifted from my saddle, and the bandage being removed from my eyes, I beheld a small valley filled with the black tents and sturdy flocks of the Turcoman band. I was henceforth treated with sinister consideration; my ghastliest fears were aroused by this parody of kindness, and I allowed myself to be led



into the women's quarters and supplied with food without daring, even, to beg for mercy from my savage jailers. Sallie I saw no more; poor girl, I tremble for her life, and for all that the good creature held still more dear.

"I was forced to eat a little supper of tough mutton stewed with onions and dates, and to drink a bowl of sour milk so liberally salted that I perished for thirst during the remainder of that long and torturing night; the darkness into which my tent was plunged was as noonday compared to my spirit's black despair.

"In the morning, an old Turcoman woman performed my toilette with some care; I was bathed, my hair was brushed and braided, and I was clothed in the garments I now wear. My arms were loaded with heavy gold bracelets; a barbaric necklet of gold was clasped about my throat, almost throttling me by its enormous weight. Finally, I was swaddled like an infant in shawls, and placed upon the saddle-bow of the chief's gigantic Khorasan horse. All day, through terrific alternations of heat and cold, through high and intricate defiles and burning plains, my husband's murderer and I rode onward in complete silence. By nightfall we were at the gates of Shiraz.

"The weakness and apathy of a condition without hope and without help now descended upon me; I permitted myself to be carried into the palace, neither opening my eyes nor displaying any other sign of consciousness. The Chief's strong arms relinquished me to a soft and infinitely repellent grasp; I knew that a woman held me. I heard

her voice, guttural and thickly sweet, like an asthmatic pigeon, above my head; she was evidently quarrelling with the man, but I could not, I would not, open my eyes to look into a countenance which I instinctively felt could fill me only with horror and disgust."

"You were right, my dear," said Shekerleb sympathetically. "The Banou is both corpulent and abandoned; I consider her hideous. At that moment, too, in spite of her contralto dove-notes, she was furiously angry; she was quite capable of scooping out your eyes with her long finger-nails had you had the temerity to open them."

"Be careful, *Khanum*, you are frightening the child," said the priest in mild remonstrance, while Jennifer blanched perceptibly at the lady's suggestion.

"The Banou was angry," continued the princess volubly, "because she thought that her cousin Aslan had brought her a corpse; you looked remarkably dead, dear madam. Of course you have an extremely white skin, and doubtless the shawls were suffocating; certainly I despaired of reviving you. You are fortunate to have fallen into my care; the Banou might even now be shaking in your poor little face the dried skin of a female hyena and feeding you with pills made from a monkey's liver, merely in order to make you more attractive to the Shah. She is an ignorant and superstitious person, inordinately cruel, and of a very low grade of intelligence. I do not believe that she has read a single ode of Hafiz, and any camel-driver in Shiraz can recite more classical verse than this illiterate creature."

The contemptuous tone in which the princess pronounced this statement apprised Jennifer of the fact that Shekerleb, like her own mother, was a voracious reader of poetry; the circumstance seemed a happy augury of friendship, and she closed her eyes with a contented smile. The princess, looking down at her, began to chant, in a delicate soprano, the three hundredth and thirty-first ode of Hafiz, wherein occurs that lovely line, "A baby fallen from the moon."

"She is asleep," said Shekerleb at last, and was silent.

"She is asleep," said Father O'Donnell; he rose and prepared to leave the room on tiptoe. "I shall ponder the matter carefully, my friends, and with the help of prayer, I may yet arrive at some solution of our difficulties." He raised his hand in a brief gesture of benediction, and departed.

"She is asleep," said the prince in an hypnotic whisper; he approached the couch and stooped over it in a dreaming tranquillity of awe. Then he lifted Jennifer's hand to his lips and kissed it with infinite gentleness.

He moved towards the door, which brimmed with spangled blue darkness; as he stepped across the threshold, his mother spoke to him in a clear voice.

"Do you love her better than you love me?" she asked nonchalantly. Her son turned and looked at her intently; his dark eyes, soft as a pair of velvet butterflies, skimmed lightly over the undisturbed surface of her face, avoiding her own eyes with swift and exquisite dexterity.

"Of course not," he said firmly and mendaciously.

He passed, without a sound, into the blue and silver night.

Five minutes later, the prince had flung himself face downward in the dewy grass, under a dripping canopy of white roses. He was weeping, but not bitterly; it is doubtful whether his tears contained any appreciable quantity of salt; certainly they were innocent of either blood or gall. Their composition was not unlike that of the purest Fajhum rose-water; they mingled without sharpness with the dew upon the slumbering flowers.



#### 4. THE HERON'S FEATHER



THE following morning, Jennifer awoke to a chorus of birds and the sweetness of shaken honeysuckle. She felt secure and almost happy; the princess, entering, seemed a comrade. Their clear eyes met in an unguarded glance.

Shekerleb carried in her hands a small tray of hammered brass; upon this were laid forth, in the most appetising manner, a fine sugar melon of Kashan, a plateful of little brown cakes, and a glass of white Kismischean wine. "Drink this, my dear," said the princess encouragingly, "the Banou is coming to see you, and you will need nourishment."

At this terrifying news, poor Jennifer began to cry; she hid her head under the folds of her shawl and refused to be comforted for some minutes. At the end of that time, finding her young friend still in tears, Shekerleb said philosophically, "After all, child, you are affianced to my son, and the Banou cannot harm you." There was not the slightest foundation for this boast, but both ladies believed it implicitly; the princess sighed, and the girl looked up at her gratefully.

"Do you really consider an engagement is proper, at present?" she inquired.

"Under the circumstances, yes," Shekerleb replied with resignation. "My son is extremely young, but he has set his heart upon you, and if you are slain, or even delivered over to the caresses of Kerim



Khan, I fear that the boy will suffer in health and spirits; such an incident might seriously disturb his peace of mind and interfere with his education. He is very sensitive and impressionable." She brooded for a moment in maternal sadness, and then went on more cheerfully.

"After all, it might be worse; you are beautiful, and your birth and breeding are highly satisfactory. It is a pity that you are a member of a Giaour family, however prominent and respected in your own land. But of that, no matter; I hope I am incapable of petty prejudice where my dear son's happiness is concerned. It will be your cherished duty to protect him from the rough assaults of reality long after I am laid to rest in well-deserved weariness," and she began to weep at the picture thus conjured up, for though she was no more than fifty years old, she often indulged in the luxury of tears at her own imagined obsequies.

At this moment, a loud noise in the courtyard announced the arrival of the Banou; Shekerleb hastily set the tray upon a small table and began to arrange Jennifer's tangled locks in some semblance of order. The girl, her face like white glass and her hair like feathers of flame, had never appeared so lovely or so lost a thing as at the exact instant of the Banou's alarming entrance; she was a candle dying in the wind of wicked destiny.

The Banou was preceded by two enormous Ethiopian eunuchs; her own great bulk was sexless in its black wrappings. As soon as this covering was flung aside, however, her huge breasts and undulating haunches proclaimed her womanhood; she reeked of raw female. Scented, painted, and clothed with a

gorgeousness at once rich and grotesque, she filled the cool room with an overpowering heat and odour; she steamed and bubbled like a cauldron of gross unguents. The fastidious princess hid her disgust under the gloss of perfect courtesy; Jennifer, too weak for pretence, lay limp and extinguished upon the couch; her heart had almost stopped beating.

"Is the girl dead?" the Banou asked in a throaty chuckle. She touched Jennifer's closed eyes with a henna-crimsoned hand.

"No, Banou; the child still lives," answered Shekerleb unsmilingly. She stood, a genteelly defiant little figure, facing the Banou; it was abundantly evident that she had been born a lady and the Banou a Turcoman.

"The child lives," she repeated solemnly, "but I cannot answer for her survival of any alarm or disturbance; I must humbly suggest that she be left in complete isolation for a few days." Jennifer breathed again, but the princess continued more ominously, "I have the gravest fears for her life; in fact, I do not believe that even the combined efforts of my son and myself can save her from an early grave; her constitution has been weakened beyond hope of recovery. We must prepare for the worst." She shook her head dolefully, at the same time giving a sharp but reassuring pinch to Jennifer's arm, a form of comfort which the terrified girl was at a loss to understand.

"There is nothing the matter with her except starvation," said the Banou in a rich, greedy voice. "Observe her revolting state of emaciation; this wrist is like a little bone that has been picked by a yellow dog. Faugh—she sickens me; I shall lose

my appetite for the mid-day meal if I look at her much longer."

She heaved with disgusting laughter, playing a tattoo on Jennifer's thin collar-bone with cushiony fingers. "But she has fine eyes and magnificent hair; put twenty-five pounds of human flesh on that ramshackle affair she calls her body, and she might fit very comfortably into the Khan's lap one of these evenings. I suppose my pretty Abbas fed her on three violets and a drop of honey; tell him that she must have sheep's tails smothered in rice and butter, thick soups, good greasy fricassees, and as much pure fat as she can stomach; I should strongly advise her to drink a mixture of cream and olive oil with her meals."

Jennifer fainted.

"It is hardly in accordance with correct Persian fashion—" began Shekerleb, who had a thorough contempt for the Banou's inelegant tastes. Then she noticed her young guest's condition; a hopeful light came into her eyes.

"I think you have killed her, Madam," she said respectfully; "she had a very timid nature."

"Nonsense," said the Banou angrily. "She's no more dead than I am; she has simply fainted from hunger. This is the fault of that wretched scullion Abbas; if he cannot fatten her into the semblance of humanity within the week I shall have him beaten with a poisoned knout and thrown into the fish-pond to nourish the carp."

The boy's mother felt no alarm at these threats, for she was well aware that the prince was far too accomplished a cook to be put to death by a notorious glutton; his famous eggs fried in sugar and

butter would alone have saved him from the slightest possibility of danger. The Banou's next words, however, left the princess a little uneasy.

"As for the girl," the atrocious woman announced without shame, "I shall give her a week, and then, if she has not grown any fatter, I shall allow the Nubian slaves to administer the bow-string; afterwards, as a salutary lesson for Abbas, he may have the privilege of stuffing her with pistachio nuts and roasting her like a spring lamb for the Khan's birthday banquet; Kerim shall taste this delicacy in one form or the other." She laughed loudly and unpleasantly; Shekerleb perceived that she felt a certain annoyance on the subject of the monarch's senile amours, and while always thoroughly at ease in her character of procuress, still cherished a mild regret for her former profession of odalisque.

The Banou waddled from the room, diffusing upon the pure air of the princess's apartment a medley of egregious perfumes both foreign and domestic; a dreadful heat, like the slow combustion of decay, seemed disseminated from her person.

Shekerleb immediately opened a greenish crystal flask of orange-flower water, and began to fan Jennifer with a white heron's wing mounted in silver. The girl revived at once.

"Has she gone?" she inquired wildly, tossing from side to side upon the soft pillows like one in the throes of a high fever. "And, oh, my dear princess, do you truly believe me to be upon the point of death? In heaven's name, only tell me that you do, for then I shall be saved from the hideous future in store for me! Oh, madam, madam, could you but dream with what a passion

of repugnance I have, since my earliest infancy, turned shuddering from the very thought of mutton fat! And now—actually to be forced to eat it! Better a thousand times a swift annihilation than such a torturing indignity! Oh, death, come quickly, and hide me in the security of any grave, from this disastrous fate!”

She shivered from head to foot in a delirium of fear; Abbas, entering quietly from the garden, his arms full of white and yellow roses, his slim figure clad in a cool harmony of white and fading gold, was horrified to behold the pathetic spectacle of her agony and grief. He rushed towards the couch, letting the roses fall unheeded upon the blue-tiled floor.

“Mother!” he cried reproachfully, turning on his innocent parent a look of stern rebuke. “What have you done to her?”

“I have done nothing except wait upon her faithfully since a quarter to nine o’clock,” the princess answered tranquilly. “The Banou has been here, however, and seems to have excited her a little.” She sniffed with exquisite refinement.

“I am probably dying,” Jennifer said with gentle self-satisfaction. Her fear had largely subsided; the prince’s presence in the room refreshed her fevered weariness like the shadow of a tree or the shimmer of a fountain.

“Never, my beloved, while the breath of life—” he began in a shaking voice, but his mother interrupted him.

“It might be a very good thing,” she said demurely.

Jennifer nodded mutely, in mournful acquies-



cence, but the prince turned paler than his shirt. He stared at Shekerleb like one who discovers a ghou! among the flowers of his darling's tomb.

"What—did—you—say?" he finally enunciated with white lips.

The princess smiled with a pleased consciousness of perfect altruism; if she had ever secretly entertained any desire for the girl's demise, her mother's heart had long since overcome it. It was but too apparent that such an event would cause the prince intolerable pain, and from this he must be saved at all cost to her own feelings. She was, indeed, a devoted mother.

"You are a pair of silly children," she permitted herself to reply with a slight air of superiority. "Any clever person should be able to see at once that in some such direction lies her only hope of safety. Of course she need not really die"—Jennifer looked relieved, and Abbas bestowed a bright smile upon his mother which she deliberately ignored—"she need not really die; I have still a small quantity of that narcotic powder which my father purchased in Aracan. A dose of this very singular drug produces sleep so profound and lasting that the ignorant invariably suppose it be death itself; the deep trance persists for three days, and the illusion is complete. Let us give the young lady one of these powders, dissolved in a little wine; after I have announced her death to the Banou we will convey her to a place of safety, on the pretext of interring her; our combined ingenuities should easily arrange the rest. It will be very simple," she finished happily, "and surely very romantic."

All three looked thoroughly pleased; they had the

air of a pair of light-hearted conspirators preparing to kidnap an affectionate baby. They gazed at each other with large and excited eyes and drew closer in whispered confabulation. Without, the birds sang incessantly and the roses bloomed in rich profusion.

A sudden brisk knock upon the outer door brought Abbas to his feet with a nervous start.

"It is Father O'Donnell," he said, an expression of annoyance clouding his smooth brow. "I fear he will have some objection to offer; he spoke last night of the Patriarch of Antioch, and even of Armenia. It appears that a large Christian settlement surrounds the monastery of the Three Churches at the foot of Agri Dagh, upon whose summit, in bygone days, the ark of Noah rested from the waves. He is determined that my bride shall be among Christians; he is also extremely insistent upon the purely conventional point of the year's delay which English social custom has interposed between a widow, however young and lovely, and the happiness which her heart may demand. He is a very obstinate man."

Father O'Donnell knocked again, and louder. Abbas was trembling slightly.

"Go, my son, and admit your friend," said Shekerleb, "it is not necessary to acquaint him with our plan; it is entirely a family affair. He is a well-meaning person, but we need not ask his advice upon really important matters. He has served very nicely to teach you foreign tongues and history, he is even skilled in the intricacies of our own literature, but I have never trusted his judgment, and after all, he is only a Giaour." She laughed a little

scornfully; the prince walked slowly to the door and admitted Father O'Donnell. The priest entered the room with a firm step and a lively expression of countenance; his handsome face looked fresh and care-free. He was visibly in the best of health and humour.

"I have been thinking of the narcotic powder your parents brought from Aracan," he said immediately to the princess, when he had given them all his greeting and benediction. "I believe that by means of that miraculous drug we may effect the escape and ultimate safety of this poor child; 'tis a thing which must be done and so shall be done, by the help of faith and our own faithful efforts."

Abbas and Shekerleb started guiltily and exchanged glances of confusion and alarm; Jennifer was too bewildered to understand a word of the conversation, whose meaning had for some moments eluded her fatigued intelligence, and which now became more and more impossible for her faculties to grasp. Fortunately her trusting nature, though severely shaken by the events of the past few days, enabled her to lie contentedly enough in a species of half-dream, while above her sleepy head the tongues of the others drove busily back and forth like shuttles weaving light or darkness for her future wear.

"I will leave the business of the hypnotic draught to you, Khanum," Father O'Donnell was saying eagerly, "but will myself undertake to break the news of her supposed death to the Khan; I am in fairly good odour with the old gentleman at present. I will then explain that, as the daughter of a great Giaour lord, her noble birth entitles her to

Christian burial, and that in the renowned Armenian monastery of the Three Churches there exists a crypt or vault precisely suited to this purpose. Of course that is not strictly true, as the monks would never admit even a dead woman within their walls, but our problem demands desperate remedies, and our consciences may be clear. I shall then convey the apparent corpse to Armenia, and leave our young friend in the kindly charge of the wife of one of the leading citizens of the pleasant village of Gavmishlu. There, recommended to God and Saint Gregorio, she may pass her first year of widowhood in a peaceful and decorous manner; at the end of this period I, for one, can see no objection to the marriage which my pupil here so ardently desires."

He smiled indulgently at the prince, who covered up his sulkiness and impatience as best he could, by nibbling rose-leaves, kicking his mother surreptitiously under the table, and darting veiled but impassioned looks at Jennifer. Shekerleb began to protest a little, in her impulsive way, at this prospect of unnecessary delay in the matter of her son's happiness, but she soon grew silent under the painful promptings of his green morocco slippers. Father O'Donnell talked on imperturbably; the object of their mutual anxiety had relinquished her will to a most profound and dreamless slumber.

The benign influence of sleep fell more softly than the moted sunbeams across her innocent face, colouring it with tranquillity and the serener tints of childhood. Thus, relaxed and untroubled, she appeared no more than twelve years old, her brow untouched by weariness or terror, her beauty impersonal and transparent as the air itself. She

seemed drained of the denser stuff of humanity, like a crystal cup too lovely to pollute with wine. Her very bloodlessness suggested merely a bodily purity and grace; Father O'Donnell alone had the wisdom and common-sense to pity so exquisite a creature.

The princess sat congratulating herself upon the very evident refinement of the girl's small features; she thanked Allah that her grandchildren would be able to count upon straight noses and short upper lips. The prince clenched his hands and closed his eyes in an ecstasy of spiritual greed; he was an admirably virtuous youth, but his possessive instincts were unduly strong, and his heart-strings were racked and torn asunder by several painful emotions as he contemplated the living and beloved image of his ideal.

When Father O'Donnell had at last departed, after appointing that evening for a further discussion of plans, the prince turned to his mother in some agitation.

"Surely, surely, you do not mean to be influenced by his opinion in this affair?" he inquired peevishly; his nerves were but too evidently shattered by excitement and suspense; he had the greatest difficulty in controlling his voice and the movements of his slender hands. His mother looked at him sympathetically; she saw that he was in no condition to be opposed or angered.

"Certainly not, my child," she replied soothingly, laying her plump little palm upon his thin and twitching fingers. "Set your mind at rest on that score. I do not approve of long engagements, and beside, the Banou will never allow the Isauvi to steal the girl like a sheep before her very eyes. He is a



kind man, but simple-minded in the extreme; he has no gift for diplomacy." Her tone of good-humoured contempt fell like balsam drops healing the wounded fury of the prince's thoughts; he saw his mother as a strong and beneficent creature, capable of coping with a dozen licentious monarchs and cowardly priests.

The light of happy expectancy which now chased the thwarted frown from his brow penetrated the secret places of his mother's heart like wine. She felt exalted, appeased, and prepared for immolation on an immediate altar.

"You shall marry the girl at once," she cried superbly. "I will go fetch a priest of our own persuasion, and by dispensing with some of the less important ceremony, the wedding shall be solemnised this same night. Do not worry; I will arrange it all; only be calm, my little enameled falcon, and you shall have your desire." She ran from the room, scattering tears and smiles like pale and rosy flowers in her path.

The prince sat up, drying his eyes and arranging his love-locks with an air of dreamy abstraction. Then he turned towards the couch; it was empty.

He leapt to his feet with an exclamation of horror, and gaining the doorway in a single graceful bound, snatched Jennifer from its very threshold; the girl stood swaying in the sunshine, dazed and blinded by its sudden brilliance, and shaken like a spray of white blossoms by the hot south wind. Meekly she surrendered herself to the prince's care, but when he had laid her on the divan and covered her up with a shawl as a vague precaution against harm, he saw that she was weeping uncontrollably.

"I will not be strangled, I will not be stolen like a sheep, and I will not, no, not even for you, be married by a Pagan priest," she sobbed breathlessly, displaying an unwonted vivacity in her protesting cries. "I will not be forced to eat fat mutton, and I will not wear these hateful and improper clothes another minute!"

She made a brief and ineffectual attempt to rise; the prince pushed her gently back against the pillows, and asked solicitously, "Shall I not bring you a glass of iced wine or a cooling sherbet? I think you are feverish."

Jennifer screamed faintly, and caught at his hand. "No," she implored him; "I beg of you, my dear prince, not to poison me or administer a narcotic powder. I am terribly frightened, and I want very much to go home!" At this point her sobs became so poignantly heart-rending that the emotional boy was himself completely overcome; they lay helpless, she upon the couch and he half-kneeling beside it, while an unreasoning passion of despair descended upon them both, violent yet essentially slight and evanescent as an April storm.

Jennifer recovered herself first; she leaned over the prince and patted him with timid and affectionate pity upon the top of his head.

"Don't cry; please don't cry," she said gently. "I am not really afraid of you; I am simply a little hysterical because so many and such curious things have happened to me recently. But pray believe that I am not really afraid of you." She looked long at his sleek dark head with its shaven crown; he continued to hide his face against the edge of the couch, and she to stroke his hair with her finger-tips each

time his shoulders were shaken by a sob. Finally she added, in a small voice, and greatly to her own surprise, "I love you."

"But as a sister; purely as a sister," she amended a moment later under the too ecstatic impact of his response. "I do not wish to marry any one at present. Neither do I wish to go to Armenia, and as for staying in the vicinity of the palace, I should very shortly perish of trepidation and suspense in so sinister an environment. I appeal to you, beloved and desired though but lately discovered brother of my heart, to rescue me from this triple dilemma. I think, perhaps, that we had better go back to Devonshire at once; my parents will welcome you as friend and kinsman; you will be as another son to their old age, and should our affections ripen into something more than fraternal sentiments, they will bless our union and watch over us always. It will be delightfully quiet in Cleverly-Neville after so much danger and distress; I am sure that you will find our simple country life congenial and soothing in the extreme. The soft climate of Devonshire is very tranquillising to the nerves," she ended complacently, "and I have no doubt that my dear father will put the little dower house in perfect order in the event of our marriage; its situation is charmingly retired and peaceful." Mentally she withdrew to the seclusion of the dower house, closing white doors and settling flowered curtains against the fiery present.

"I wish I might conceal you in the fabulous caves of Kashan," said the prince tenderly. "Legend relates the existence there of a magical well, deeper than the hills are high, at the bottom of which bloom perpetual gardens of enchantment. But I am

afraid the idea is not entirely practical." He sighed.

"Do not allow yourself to be disheartened by our apparent difficulties," said Jennifer kindly, rather relishing the sensation of being, for once, the wise and capable woman of affairs. "I am sure that, by taking a little thought, we can arrange everything quite simply and pleasantly. It is only a question of escaping from Shiraz and reaching England as soon as possible; I do not believe that England can be so far away as Armenia, for example; it is not in the least that sort of place. I have always observed that civilised countries are more accessible than savage ones," she remarked profoundly. "Of course we cannot return by way of Bushire and the sea; the Turcomans make the mountains quite impassable, and as for the sea, I am unfortunately a wretched sailor. But I feel assured that if we travel north by easy stages we shall eventually find ourselves in France, or, at the very worst, Germany, and from these comparatively homelike regions almost any one will be able to direct us to Devonshire. I trust that we shall not be required by providence to leave Cleverly-Neville again; I am tired of travelling." Indeed, her exhausted looks bespoke the truth of this very moderate statement, but her eyes were startlingly illuminated by hope, and her bright hair seemed to play like dancing flames above her lifted brow.

The prince was impressed; he felt that the daughter of a *peri* and the descendant of a Tartar king could accomplish many miracles forbidden to ordinary mortals. From that instant he laid his slight and changeable will in her white incompetent hands,

with a pathetic trust in their superhuman powers. His wearied little soul forgot bewilderment and fear, floating in the hollow cloud of a heaven almost attained.

"What shall I do?" he asked humbly; although he was at most times a coward, he was sincerely sorry that there existed no necessity for sacrificing his life in her service. His eyes mirrored darkly a dumb unquestioning devotion.

"I suppose we must first procure horses, and food for our journey," said Jennifer seriously. She felt her responsibility deeply; in some dim fashion she realised that henceforth she must be the leader of their adventurings, and for the first time in her life she was conscious of a desire to be strong and bold. In a word, all her care now was to protect and comfort her young comrade while contriving a mutual safety for their lives and fortunes.

"I have plenty of horses to ride," began Abbas with a royal air. "Of course, strictly speaking, they do not belong to me, but since I am the rightful prince of this country—"

"No, no, my dear," Jennifer interrupted gently, "we must not dream of stealing anything; it would really not be right. Have you no horse of your own?" The circumstances of her life had led her to assume that every well-bred human being possessed at least a dozen horses.

"I have a beautiful little grey donkey," the prince admitted at last, rather shyly. "He is growing old, but his strength is really remarkable, and he is the most docile creature imaginable. If you would not despise such an animal—" the boy was silent, lower-



ing his eyes before a vision of the white-maned, silver-tasseled steeds of his desires. "He is perhaps not very suitable for your perfection," he murmured, sorrowfully kissing her hand.

Jennifer took both his hands in hers and held them against her heart; he could feel its unstable tripping beat under the white shawl. She looked at him with extraordinary tenderness and surprise. "I love donkeys," she said in the voice of a young mother whispering her child to sleep. There was compassion in her voice, and a certain composed and dedicated quality of lovingkindness.

"There is also the question of disguise," she continued. "Perhaps it would be well for me to don masculine attire like my ancestress Lady Helena, for the singularity of my present costume cannot hope to escape attention. If you happen to have—" She stopped, blushing deeply and hanging her head.

"I have," said the prince, exhibiting symptoms of a like embarrassment; "I believe that my garments of two summers ago will—will be quite practicable. I was not so tall at that time, you understand, and—" The remainder of his words died still-born; he mopped his brow with a printed silk handkerchief, and looked appealingly at Jennifer.

She had already assumed an expression of courageous calm; her small hands were clenched, her eyes dilated. "If you will fetch them, and leave me for a space, I will effect the necessary change," she answered bravely.

The prince sauntered from the room, attempting to look unconcerned; when he returned, singing a little Persian folk-song under his excited breath, he bore a hastily folded bundle of fine silk and cotton

stuffs. With an air of well-bred abstraction he brought forth from the corner his mother's silver ewer of sweet-scented spring water; a fleecy Turkish towel was flung negligently upon the couch; a huge bowl of sapphire glass appeared mysteriously from nowhere. He rummaged among his mother's possessions and produced, with the manner of a sleep-walking conjuror, various fragrant powders and fascinating perfumes, from the macerated roots of orris to the heavier attar of rose. Then, wordlessly, he drifted from the shadowy chamber like a breath of wind.

Had Bernadin de Saint Pierre's celebrated romance of *Paul et Virginie* been completed at that time there is no doubt whatever that its conclusion would have been favourably endorsed by Jennifer; the novelist, for his part, might have received valuable and edifying hints from the demeanour of the girl upon the present occasion. She made fast the lock of the door and drew yet closer the slats of the blue *persiennes* at every window; she surrounded the basin and ewer with a tall screen, pierced and painted like a lady's fan. Finally, her ivory pallor suffused by the colour of natural delicacy, she approached the bundle of silk and cotton stuffs, and, with trembling fingers, untied the knot whereby its contents were secured from view.

Half an hour later, the prince, leaving the little rose-hung stable where he had been engaged in saddling his donkey and providing the faithful animal with a generous meal of oats, topped off by a fragment of sugar candy and a fine Demavend apple, noticed with dismay that the shadows were already lengthening upon the emerald lawns of the palace

garden. He hastened his light step, and arriving at his own door, was preparing to knock, when the door flew open in his face, revealing a slim and lovely boy attired with princely magnificence. White, tarnished silver, and thin traceries of black and scarlet combined to produce a costume of startling elegance and distinction. The exquisite and ambiguous creature confronting him bore in one hand a mirror; the other clutched a long strip of black silk which the prince immediately recognised as a turban. A torrent of unconfined and shining copper hair fell about the shoulders of this amazing apparition.

"Will you be good enough to arrange my turban for me?" Jennifer asked him without a trace of her former embarrassment, at the same time regarding the mirror with steadfast satisfaction. "I cannot manage it, because I have such quantities of hair, but I believe that it will be very becoming if properly draped, with perhaps a simple jewel among its folds."

Her face was intent and fixed upon her image in the mirror; vanity had superseded shyness in her innocent mind. At once, her childish eagerness put the prince completely at his ease.

A moment after, she had seated herself before the large silver looking-glass suspended above Shekerleb's dressing table; the prince stood behind her. "How well these fantastic garments suit my peculiar type of beauty!" she prattled on happily, piling her hair into a twisted coronet with careless hands. "Dear Gerald would have been enchanted; his taste was always for the fanciful and singular, though chaste and delicate, in art." Her countenance

clouded with soft regret, and then flashed into ecstasy as the prince wound the turban above her milky brow and set a heron's feather, misted with tiny brilliants, in the centre of the black folds. Quick as imagination, he pulled two springy tendrils of bright hair from beneath their covering, and let them lie coiled, like rings of golden wire, against her clear temples and smooth cheeks. Then he stepped back, with the air of a magician, and clapped his hands silently, as if summoning fellow-sprites to admire a peri's loveliness.

"Oh, beautiful!" they breathed with simultaneous awe, contemplating the picture in the mirror as if louder words could shatter it to crumbs of quicksilver and glass.

Then, as Abbas flung a cloak of black Kermanshah weave over her scintillation, Jennifer rose slowly to her feet, and remarked, examining her little slippers of red morocco, "And only think, if it were not for these shoes and the small scarlet flowers on my tunic, it would really be half-mourning, and so admirably adapted to my present needs." It was plain that she extracted a certain mild comfort from this reflection, though she would have discarded the red slippers with extreme reluctance.

The prince, who was totally unable to understand her train of thought, was content with her obvious pleasure, fondly believing that the subtlety of her etherial mental processes transcended his grosser mind; he still regarded her as a supernatural being. It must be admitted that her appearance fully justified this extravagant supposition.

"Come; there is no time to be lost," he said with

gentle firmness, taking her hand in his. He was actually so exalted and transformed by the power of love that he forgot to look at himself in the mirror after donning his own cloak of heavy violet wool; fortunately its graceful folds fell obediently into lines of classic beauty about his slender limbs. "My mother may return at any moment, with a mollah, or Father O'Donnell may come back with a map of Armenia and a quantity of good advice. I am weary of arguing with old people; let us be gone at once, my silver dove."

"Will not your absence cause your mother considerable alarm?" Jennifer asked, looking faintly troubled; her thoughtful nature ever shrank from causing pain.

"Possibly," admitted the prince with some impatience. He seized a scrap of vellum and drew from his belt a pretty gilt pen and a diminutive ink-horn. Although forbidden by his father's will to practise the art professionally, he was an accomplished amateur draughtsman and writer of elegant script. "I will leave a little note for her, and decorate its margin with an amusing design; I think a picture of our two hearts—so—with a slightly malicious caricature of Father O'Donnell attempting to separate them will be certain to appeal to her sense of humour. Then an affectionate message from us both, and an assurance of a happy if distant reunion; she cannot fail to be satisfied." He executed the writing with hurried skill, and depositing it upon his mother's pin-cushion, drew Jennifer swiftly from the room.

An hour later, under the diffused and amber rays of the declining sun, a small grey donkey might have



been observed traversing the northern environs of Shiraz; on either side of the patient beast strolled a slim and languid youth of princely bearing. The taller of the two wore a violet cloak; the other was enveloped in a black mantle of unrelieved and sombre richness.



## 5. THE SERPENT IN PERSEPOLIS



**W**HETHER owing to her sudden but none the less sincere affection for Abbas, or to the enlivening effects of her outward change of character, a vague and mysterious metamorphosis appeared to take place in the spirit of the child Jennifer from the very instant of her escape from Shiraz. From languor she passed to the lightest vivacity; her temper became merry and wild in the extreme; she was all at once a tease, a tomboy, and a witch. Each sign of fear or weakness was soon dissipated in the full illumination and speed of her humour; she danced, she sang, she pulled down fruit from every tree and tasted the water of every wayside spring. She refused to burden the silvery back of old Rhustum the donkey with the inconsiderable thistledown of her body; her feet skipped and shied among the lights and shadows of the path, but her soul flew above them winged and darting like a dragonfly. She climbed an almond tree and pelted the prince with green astringent husks; she threw her cloak to the wind and turned a mad spontaneous handspring as the crescent moon appeared between the higher clouds and the sun dropped like a pomegranate into the cool blue valleys lying to the west of Mosella.

Upon the banks of Rocnabad they sat down to supper; spreading their cloaks upon the grass and reclining against a mossy shoulder of rock the better

to enjoy their simple fare; the stars sprinkled their bread with fire and the dews diluted their wine with enchantment. In addition to these delicacies, Abbas prepared a salad of the most ingenious charm, reciting meanwhile the loves of Megnoun and Leilah with thrilling intonation, as he mixed in a thin porcelain bowl the eggs of little birds, cream, citron juice, slices of cucumber, and the inner leaves of various delicate herbs.

"I am so happy!" sighed Jennifer, dipping a wild strawberry into her wine. "I have never been quite so happy, not even in Devonshire." She pulled off her turban, allowing her long hair to drown the sleeping hyacinths among the grasses in a veritably hyacinthine flood of light and colour. She began, very softly, to sing the Lament for Flodden; her extreme happiness made her voice more than ever mournful and forlorn.

"I, also, am reposing in a state of perfect happiness," said the prince in a hushed whisper. "I am afraid to breathe, lest the sharp breath snap one of my heart-strings and I die on a note of harmonious praise. Let me calm the clamour of my breath to silence; then it will rise without offence to your ears, like incense before the ivory shrine. And again, let the incense be invisible, nor interpose the impertinence of colour between the purity of the air and the more ghostly purity of your soul. But, I pray that the frankincense of my love may be sweet in your nostrils." He kissed the tarnished silver fringe upon Jennifer's tunic.

The girl experienced a pang of tenderness; his words, though pleasantly melodious, conveyed almost nothing to her mind, but the sound of his voice,

and, above all, the sight of the slight ripple in his smooth hair as he bent his head lower and lower until it rested at her feet, caused her heart to contract with sudden pain. She put a timid hand against his cheek; then, when she had felt his tears cold upon her hand, she drew him closer until she had hidden his tears under her hair and dried them with the little warmth and comfort of her breast.

So they sat for perhaps an hour, sundered by immensities, yet bound together by a hundred common ties of childishness and vanity and weakness; innocence had not left them, nor human love approached too near. Their mutual affection was like one of those beautiful blue butterflies of Cashmere, so rare and so elusive, which exist in the upper regions of the air but seldom present themselves to mortal view.

At last, the prince rose, and, stooping over Jennifer, kissed her with the most reverential composure. Their lips met scrupulously and in silence; as she closed her eyes under the tented bower of eglantine which shielded her from the sky, she saw him walk quickly over the summit of a little hill and disappear among a grove of tamarisks. The moonlight was shed like water from his moving figure, and he was gone. In absolute tranquillity and trust she pulled the cloak about her shoulders, laid her cheek against her folded hands, and slept.

For twelve days their delightful journey continued, uninterrupted save by playful excursions through the fruitful fields and vineyards of the adjacent country, and by the night's welcome and uneventful repose. The large panniers which swung on either side of Rhustum's saddle were constantly

replenished with fresh vegetables; grapes from the vines, and a variety of wild and cultivated fruit was always within the reach of their most idle wish. The wine-shops, or as the romantic prince preferred to call them, Magian convents, were numerous and good, but the young companions preferred in the main to drink water enhanced by flavoured citron or sharper lime. Their food was simple but sustaining; eggs, milk, and butter were purchased without difficulty from the complacent peasantry, and now and then a tumbling hilly stream afforded trout or royal salmon to the prince's skill. Game birds abounded; golden pheasants, snow-cocks, black partridge and iridescent doves hid in every wood, but the children were too tender-hearted to harm these beautiful creatures, and, moreover, they lacked the means no less than the will to slay them.

At the end of a week of this jocund and salutary life, the pair had completely lost their pallid looks and languishing manners; they were as bright-eyed and agile as the hares and slim gazelles which frolicked in the deeper forests. In addition to this charming outward alteration, their natures had enjoyed a comparable improvement; Abbas was no longer spoiled and peevish, nor Jennifer vain and melancholy. A benignant miracle had been performed in the very substance of their flesh and spirit; they were not merely like two pining birds suddenly released from the guilt cruelty of their cage, they were, it appeared, a pair of expensive but sickly little pigeons hilariously transformed into meadow larks.

As they walked one golden morning through the vineyards of Khullar, the boy turned to his com-



panion to inquire, "Would you not like, my star of dawn, to visit the strange city of Istakhr, perhaps better known to you by its antique title of Persepolis? It lies a little to the east of our ideal course, but well warrants a short delay in its fallen but enormous splendour. What say you, my imperishable rose?"

"I think it sounds an excessively charming plan," cried Jennifer with enthusiasm. "Let us not waste too much time over the ruins, my prince, but find some cool and quiet spot wherein to enjoy our fruit and salad; while you recite a sweetly pensive ode, or give your exquisite imitation of the Persian singing-birds, I can employ myself in mending that rent in your mantle. If you are not too tired, you might make a few pancakes; I will beat the eggs and whip the cream with pleasure. It will be utterly delightful; have we time to reach Persepolis to-day?"

"I think not," said Abbas kindly, smiling in spite of himself at her youthful frivolity. "I think not, but we can easily cover the distance by to-morrow afternoon, and that without undue haste. I heartily agree with you, my pearl of antelopes, in your distaste for the dull science of archæology; Father O'Donnell wearied me well-nigh beyond endurance by his insistence upon its dusty detail. But history"—his eyes lit with luminous points of gold—"and above all ancient history, especially when it is admittedly untrue—ah, that delights my soul, even as such fascinating subjects as judicial astrology and the higher branches of advanced necromancies."

Jennifer thought him very clever, but she was accustomed to cleverness, and soon beguiled him, by

way of a brief discussion of the character of Zoroaster, into a game of hide-and-seek among the grapevines. Her influence over the prince's mind was a constant source of wonder to the girl, who had invariably played the part of feathered shuttlecock to the obstinacy of others. Her husband had always appeared completely unmoved and imperturbable; she marvelled incessantly to behold her curious power in regard to the temperamental Abbas, never doubting, however, in view of his revived condition, that her power was no less benign than strong, in which faith she was, in all probability, correct.

Towards sunset on the following afternoon the two young travellers approached the terrible ruins of Persepolis, which soared among the tinted clouds of evening with an effect of majesty hardly inferior to the heavens themselves. Abbas was irresistibly reminded of the fabulous cities of Shadukiam and Ambreabad, abodes of peris, and capitals of legendary Ginnistan, while to Jennifer the imposing spectacle forcibly recalled her first sight of London. They clutched each the other's hand in an ecstasy of bewilderment and awe; their eyes widened and their faces paled before the unbelievable vision of Istahkr, city of Solyman and spoil of Alexander, standing naked and noble as the skeleton of all past greatness still challenging oblivious eternity.

The children insensibly drew closer; they lacked the courage to ascend the vast flight of steps leading to the terrace of the minarets, those lofty columns each consecrated to a star, which Solyman ben Daoud had lifted from the earth to support the impious elevation of his own mind. Above them, carven from the black marble of the hillside itself,

the graves of the preadamite sultans preserved a sinister repose.

Tethering Rhustam to the lower limbs of a thunder-blasted tree, the two huddled under the shelter of a projecting rock; a few violets and other pastoral flowers flourished in this hidden place, where the rays of the sun were caught and held and the wind could not enter. The prince kindled a little fire, and Jennifer brought forth their small store of fruits and ingenuous herbs; they were quiet, but composed and happy in each other's company. Having eaten sparingly, they remained crouched on the grass, in perfect silence, and clasped in a close and infinitely affectionate embrace. Their gaze was fixed upon the terrace; their hearts, accelerated by a vague trepidation, beat together consolingly.

Suddenly a voice, clear and chilly as the atmosphere above the distant mountains, smote upon their astonished senses. From between the gigantic watch-towers a tall figure emerged, clad from head to foot in white linen. A dark attendant followed in his steps, carrying a travelling-cloak of heavy white wool and a furled green umbrella. The man in white linen was far above the common height, thin and straight as a ramrod; his carriage and manner were dignified to the point of stiffness, yet he bore himself with such an air of elegance and pride that the very column lowering over his mortality seemed somewhat dwarfed by the perfection of his poise. His face was colourless and almost without expression; his features, and particularly his narrow high-bridged nose and pale arched brows, bespoke the extreme aristocrat. In one long pallid hand he carried a little volume richly bound in tree-calf;

his other arm hung in a white silk sling. His slightly sallow skin appeared bleached and transparent; his countenance was somewhat lined and drawn, and one lean cheek displayed a neat thread-like scar.

Withal, he had the air of a man invincible in strength and courage; it was impossible to associate him with weakness or failure. The prince, observing the form and size of his admirably shod feet and the set of his head upon his shoulders, concluded that he was at least a king in his own country. Though evidently a foreigner, the man was completely well-bred. The smoky yellow sunset crested this personage's sandy hair with flame as he spoke again in a cold, ringing voice.

"And ride in triumph through Persepolis!" said Gerald clearly. The slight satirical smile which played around his compressed lips excused the words for their grandiloquence, but in reality he was amused rather by the words themselves than by his use of them, for though he had read the Elizabethan dramatists at an early age, owing to the exigency of his father's library, they had more often moved him to ridicule than to admiration, and at the present moment he was inclined to laugh outright at the barbarous quality of Mr. Marlowe's blank verse. Hastily muttering a fine acrid sentence from Seneca to rid his mouth of this bombastic taste, he paused upon the brink of the black marble stairway to survey the scene before him.

He was accompanied by a short stout man, dressed in the height of Persian fashion, whom Abbas recognised as a provincial governor of some importance. The poor fellow was rendered half invisible

by Gerald's august presence; he kept nodding his head with great servility while gazing upward into the face of his companion, who noticed him no more than courtesy required.

"The ruins of the Archæmenidæ," continued Gerald with suave hauteur, "are of the most immediate interest to any student of mankind; the successive monarchs which this spot has exalted and consumed are a wise commentary on the futility of existence. Their boastful inscriptions and their arrogant sarcophagi—what are these but ashes in the mouths of the astute?"

"Quite so, your Excellency; your Excellency is abundantly right," panted the stout Persian at his elbow. Gerald went on unmoved.

"How singular is the consideration," he murmured, more to his own soul than to the receptive ears of his companion, "that my virtuous and beautiful Jennifer has joined the ranks of the unreturning dead; she sleeps with Darius and Artaxerxes, while I once more tread the dust which contains her loveliness and their magnificence. Singular, indeed, that I am alive at this instant, who was buried quite as thoroughly by my Turcoman friends as the spiced and bituminous occupants of these tombs. I have not told you, sir, of my miraculous escape from death in the passes below Shiraz," he said, turning to the other man with an air of polite condescension. "You are aware, of course, that I have had the profound misfortune to lose my young wife." He pronounced the words with icy calm, and paused for a full minute, during which he kept his eyes fixed and remote upon the remote horizon.

"As for my adventure among the savages," he



went on courteously, "it was perhaps sufficiently curious to merit a brief recital. You must know that after the wretches had apparently slain me and cast me into a deep pit with a number of stones cracking my ribs and breast-bones, they took the precaution to drive a stake through what they erroneously supposed to be my heart, but which was in reality no more than the left lapel of my cloak; my side was barely grazed in the process."

"Such are the advantages of possessing an elegant figure," said the Persian with an envious glance at Gerald's refined anatomy. The Englishman bowed gravely.

"My faithful servant here," continued Gerald, indicating Mohammed, who looked miserably embarrassed, "is no less accomplished as a surgeon than as a barber. He was captured by the tribesmen, but succeeded in eluding their vigilance the next day. Returning at once to the spot where they had interred me, he managed to remove the stones from my body, and found me to be still alive, though desperately wounded. He was not surprised; he knew me very well, and had not supposed that I could be slain with any particular ease. Not to weary your patience with lengthy explanations, I will content myself with saying that he concealed me in a commodious cavern upon a bed of wild thyme and basil, and tended me with unremitting care until my wounds, which numbered no less than seventeen, were practically healed. My health had really benefited by the enforced rest, and as soon as we had procured by strategy a pair of horses belonging to our late captors, we proceeded direct to Shiraz, where I was met by the sad news of my

wife's death at the hands of the Turcoman hordes." He paused again for a decorous space of silence, meanwhile fixing the Persian with a cold and forbidding eye, under which the unfortunate man dared not venture a single expression of condolence.

"That this city of Istakhr is one and the same with the Persepolis of more remote antiquity has been known beyond dispute since the time of Pietro della Valle, who visited it in 1621," concluded Gerald, changing the subject with calm finality. He descended the steps and disappeared among the colossal ruins of the plain, followed by his two companions; presently the sound of horses' hooves, rapidly diminishing in the distance, came to the stunned and aching senses of the two children crouched under the grass-grown slab of stone which had hidden them from view.

"It was my husband," said Jennifer in a breaking thread of voice. "It was Gerald. I tried to call out to him, but I could not. How very tall he is, and his eyes—did you notice the colour of his eyes, Abbas? They are like ice over black water, and yet they are pale, like his face. But how tall he is! I suppose I should be happy to know that he is alive, and yet—" She fell silent, hiding her face against the prince's shoulder.

"I knew he must be a great lord," Abbas replied in a tone of unwilling admiration. Then, in a burst of confidence, "He frightens you, does he not, my darling? I do not wonder at that; he frightens me also; I believe he is a Djinn."

"But how is it possible that Gerald should frighten me; is he not my husband?" asked Jennifer

in amazement, lifting her enlarged eyes, which brimmed with tears, to the prince's look of grave solicitude. "Nor can I admit the least resemblance to a Djinn, in one who is so obviously the fine flower of English gentlemen." She pronounced the words with steady lips; she was, however, shivering so violently that Abbas, believing her to be cold, drew his cloak about her tremors. She accepted the attention passively and without comment.

"He is precisely like one of the more malignant Djinn," said the prince stubbornly. "He also resembles the lost angel Harud, who stands head downward in the burning Babylonian sand, teaching sorceries to the misguided. I shall not allow you to see him again, my silver gazelle; he would assuredly devour you with his long yellow teeth." He kissed her cold fingers, and endeavouring to warm them, laid her hand against his cheek.

"My husband is a remarkably handsome man," Jennifer persisted primly. "He has beautiful teeth, and would never, under any circumstances, stand upon his head. He bears not the slightest likeness to a lost angel; I have always thought of him in connection with King Arthur, or possibly the Black Prince." The innocent creature had never heard the moral character of the Black Prince impugned; she regarded Abbas with increasing indignation.

The boy, on his part, displayed considerable obstinacy; he was, perhaps, a little jealous, and that for the first time in his life. In addition to this disturbing emotion, he was conscious of a growing sense of uneasiness in a world which contained himself and the tall gentleman in white linen.

"I think we had best be continuing our journey; we can reach one of the small villages lying north of this melancholy spot by nightfall, and the sight of a few simple human faces would be cheering to my spirits; I should also be extremely thankful for a glass of wine, as I am very tired," he said nervously. Nevertheless, he felt hopeful; Jennifer had rarely failed to respond sympathetically to complaints of fatigue. He leaned back against the rock in an attitude of exhaustion, closing his eyes and permitting the fine pallor of his face to plead for itself; his mouth was set in lines of patient suffering. He waited.

Jennifer drew herself away from him; she sat up very straight and stared at him haughtily. He was fortunate to escape the expression of outraged propriety which filled her eyes with darting and indignant lightning.

"You are an excessively silly boy, Abbas," she enunciated crisply. "If you were not so young and inexperienced I should regard your proposals as insulting to my honour; your ignorance of the world alone excuses you in your impertinent folly. Are you not aware that I am the adored and devoted wife of the heir to one of the oldest baronies in England, who is also an invaluable civil servant and the favoured friend of the Governor of Bengal?" She paused, to give her words their full and devastating effect; the prince had covered his face with the folds of his mantle, and now lay motionless. He made no answer whatever.

"I must at once request you to allow me to return to Shiraz," Jennifer went on; her manner was be-

coming more and more formal and chilling; it is a pity that the poor child was denied the opportunity of practising her new-found airs of courtly disdain in some more populous spot than the ruins of Persepolis. They would have gone very well in the salon of Madame du Deffand, for example, where she had cut so timid and shrinking a figure during the preceding winter. The urbane and unremitting efforts whereby Gerald had sought to turn his wife into a woman of the world were now at last beginning to bear fruit, fruit bitterer and less digestible than Dead Sea apples between the teeth of the unhappy prince.

He lay grinding his teeth in agony and rage, at the same time forcing back with considerable difficulty the tears which stung his eyelids like imprisoned wasps. His pride, his love, his highest and most dearly impossible hopes had fallen to a destruction no less complete, if slightly less impressive, than that which Alexander, assisted by the invincible battalions of Time, had wrought upon Persepolis. His emotions deprived him of strength and almost of life itself; his hand at that moment lacked the force to crush a worm, yet, such was the concentrated and quintessential fury of his spirit, that he would unhesitatingly have consigned the entire universe to destruction with no more pity than it cost him to crack the shell of a hazel-nut. Though he could never rise to the illustrious distinction of the Macedonian conqueror, it is probably that Abbas excelled even Alexander the Great in royal anger and tormented pride, as he lay half-fainting under the shadow of the Forty Minarets.



Jennifer rose, without another glance in his direction, and began to pack their few possessions in a shawl, which she strapped securely to Rhustum's back. The panniers were refilled with their load of fruit and cresses; the fresh eggs and pats of butter were laid carefully upon these. Then after arranging her disordered hair and smoothing out as best she could her crumpled and fantastic garments, she shook the prince gently, at the same time requesting him, in a polite but distant tone, to rise and accompany her without delay. Her eyes were like black stars ringed with amber; her uncovered head flung its fires upon the rainy wind.

At the touch of her hand upon his sleeve, the prince shuddered and appeared to sicken as if at the approach of some venomous reptile; then he struck at her hand, feebly, but with hectic violence. Jennifer started back; her eyes filled with brief tears which the wind instantly sucked from her lashes, leaving her eyes wide, and clear as dark crystals.

"An English gentleman never strikes a woman," she said with sweet composure.

As it was obviously out of the question to persuade Abbas to move before morning, Jennifer resigned herself to spending the night under the same roof with him; the roof was merely a low rocky projection, and the shelter it afforded slight and uncertain. Wrapping herself in her inky mantle, she lay down at some little distance from her companion; the cold wind and scattered drops of rain which sprinkled her couch she bore with perfect fortitude, but it was long before sleep visited her pillow. The fact that her pillow was a large frag-

ment of flint may partly have accounted for this insomnia, but the confusion and infelicity of her emotions were undoubtedly its chief cause. Abbas lay as one dead, his face turned to the blank unanswering rock, his cloak drawn over his head. From time to time she looked at him; an icy pressure constricted her heart, but her mind was firm, cool, and empty of all save a sense of decorum.

Towards morning they both fell asleep; the wind increased in cold and velocity, and the sky was overclouded. Impelled either by a desire for warmth, or by some deeper and more pathetic instinct, the two unfortunate children turned to each other's arms in the profound unconsciousness of slumber; the chilly dawn discovered them clasped in a mournful embrace, their common pillow, of which the prince had appropriated the major portion, wet with pitiable tears.

The sadness and ironical contrast presented by the homeward journey, as compared to the idyllic fortnight which preceded it, are too melancholy to bear a prolonged description. Let it suffice to relate that for every happy hour of the first innocent pilgrimage, the reversed and tragic path of the return was marked by a like period of depression, pride, and well-nigh intolerable longing.

The low mud walls and huddled roofs of Shiraz appeared at length against the southern horizon; as they passed the tomb of the poet Hafiz where it lies embowered in roses upon the confines of the city, the prince and Jennifer were both weeping inconsolably. The name evoked tender memories in the mind of each, and now they had not addressed a

single syllable one to the other during the past three days.

It was very late when they entered the palace garden, under a green and gibbous moon; a deathly silence prevailed, and the dew upon the grass was pale as ashes. Near the prince's cottage they paused, regarding each other inimically; then they spoke together, their voices cold with estrangement.

"Where are you going?" asked Jennifer and Abbas in one breath.

The prince answered first; he had the better opportunity for causing pain. "I am going to my mother," he said quietly. "I shall not see you again, I think. May I inquire as to your own destination? Shiraz is notoriously dangerous at this hour of the night; perhaps the Banou would have the charity to shelter you."

The girl, a mere ghost in a ragged cloak of darkness, could turn no paler than the last few hours had left her; her voice, however, now seemed withdrawn into her heart as the blood from her cheeks had been. In a moment she contrived to summon it; her whisper was distinct. "I am going to find my husband."

Abbas knew that she was going to her destruction; he suspected that she was going to her death, but he was deeply offended, and proud as only a prince can be proud. "I wish you happiness," he said, elaborately. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," Jennifer replied softly; the little word, shorn of every title of endearment or courtesy, fell through the air like a bird without wings.

Abruptly, without a look or gesture of forgiveness, they turned from each other in the black and

terrible night and were gone, their light and rapid footsteps rustling the grass for an instant and then passing into an echo, and thence lessening to oblivion.



## 6. THE GROVE OF CYPRESSES



**T**HEN the two eunuchs carried Jennifer into the harem, the Banou was still awake. Parting the curtains of carnation-coloured silk that separated her own apartment from that of the other women, she peered into the obscurity with angry reddened eyes, then, observing the nature of the burden borne by her henchmen, she smiled and licked her lips with satisfaction. The Khan had been ill-humoured of late, and here was a tender if unsustaining morsel for his ailing appetite.

The Banou had grown hideous in the service of sin and the indulgence of her own body, but her boldly curving nose, large brow, and sensual lips still possessed a trace of heavy symmetry and raddled bloom; only her prominent eyes, lashless and red-lidded, were beyond the help of kohl or antimony to brighten or conceal. She was dressed as usual in a profusion of rich untidy garments; the variety and pungent strength of the unguents she affected were powerless to destroy the odour of sweat which enveloped her, as her jewels were powerless to lend grace or distinction to her vast heaving limbs and bosom. To the girl, still struggling desperately in the grasp of the eunuchs, the face of the atrocious creature emerging from between the thin folds of carmine silk seemed the picture of ultimate and perfected evil; at that moment hope died within



her labouring heart, and she ceased every attempt to resist or escape the fate which awaited her.

Open-eyed, her lovely countenance still vivid with the terror in her blood and the living worm which devoured her soul alive, Jennifer suffered herself to be bathed in a great pool of black marble, in water scented with the essence of every flower; her eyelids were painted with purple antimony and her pale cheeks tinted with Egyptian rouge. The magnificent lengths of her hair, washed in the wine and the juice of lemons, were dried by Abyssinian slaves wielding great fans of peacock feathers; it spread itself upon the perfumed air like waves of sunlight made substantial. Her lips and finger nails were coloured like coral against the white transparency of her skin.

"She is pretty even now; when she is fat she will be prettier," said the Banou unctuously, pinching Jennifer's pointed chin. "She is not my favourite type, I confess; she has neither salt in her complexion nor spice in her mouth. But she will make a very wholesome breakfast for Kerim Khan; he is too old for highly seasoned dishes." She laughed long and horribly.

"Now, my love-bird," the woman continued, dangling an equivocal object before Jennifer's dilated eyes, "look carefully upon this neat plaited cord, cleverly woven from silk and cat-gut; it is none other than the renowned bow string of romance, improved and modernised by my own ingenuity! I am proud of this little invention. Behold, I hang it above your couch; sleep well, my porcelain treasure. Should you attempt to escape, this intelligent machine will automatically descend to encircle your

slender throat with a clasp more virtuous than the Khan's; its embrace, however, though impersonal and chaste, is invariably fatal. Good night; may your slumbers be tranquil and refreshing. At dawn I shall return with the Khan." She went out, extinguishing the three great lamps of golden filigree whereby the room was lit, whose lights were sanguine garnet and cornelian.

The girl lay quiet, but tense and ringing, as it were, with the rush of invisible winds and rivers; within her veins the whistling blood deafened her with its thin insistence, while the entire darkness of the place moved past her in a slower, deadlier motion, dragging her gradually onward and downward with a dreadful patience and precision. She was a minute and whirling star, turning ever upon its own axis and singing as it turned, singing without volition or delight the music of its swift destruction. The room was a channel for elemental fear and horror; around this larger circle she swung endlessly, as the planets swing about the sun. Surrounded and at the same time pierced through and through by several deaths, she was nevertheless awake and alive in the bright fever of every vein and nerve. At last, she lived; now she knew she must die.

The screen of mother-of-pearl and sandalwood which hid the eastern window of the room appeared suddenly set with larger and more luminous disks of iridescence; the dawn came through these little orifices white and pure and pearly as globes of snow-water. Then, from very far away, a tiny sound penetrated the gorgeous screen; it seemed to fall upon the ear with a tone as vague and delicate as

the colour of the dawn upon the eyelids. The girl thought it must be the voice of a wild bird, waking in too bright dawn, and lost and frightened at the instant of its waking.

The voice drew nearer, and all at once it ceased to cry like a bird; it called, and its voice was human. It was the voice of the prince calling to his love; calling and crying to his silver gazelle and his imperishable rose of ivory, who now lay dying in the very early morning with the bow-string above her head and the innermost vein of her heart broken in two forever.

Jennifer moved upon her pillows with a violent effort of will; she leaned upon her elbow and listened. Then she lifted her head and looked straight at the bow-string; it writhed before her eyes like a green and golden snake. She sat bolt upright among the crimson pillows and called to the prince in a clear melodious voice. "My dear," she called, "my dearest love, I am coming!"

As she leapt from the couch the bow-string fell softly down; she felt its silken touch upon her throat; its touch was gentle, like a caress. Then she tore at the silk and screamed; her throat and hands were all entangled in the silk and still she screamed and screamed. "Gerald—Gerald—Gerald! They have murdered me!"

So, in death, her husband possessed her completely; she died with his name upon her lips.

This circumstance would without doubt have been a source of the keenest satisfaction to Gerald, had he been aware of it; he could not, however, hear his wife's expiring words, being at that hour peacefully asleep in a distant wing of the palace. He

never, therefore, had the felicity of realising that she had called to him with her dying breath. The full comprehension of this fact was reserved for the unfortunate prince, who, standing beneath Jennifer's window, heard her cry distinctly.

For a moment his limbs failed him, and he would have fallen had he not put out his hand to grasp the lower branches of a magnificent damask rose-bush; the flowers, being full blown, quietly detached themselves and wavered to the ground as he touched them. He stood swaying in a shower of sweetness, his face like thrice-refined wax, his eyes round holes through which a darkness seemed to pour like smoke. Then, dragging his feet along the dewy grass, his head bent as if a millstone hung upon his breast, he went home to his mother, passing thin and shadow-like across the bright mirror of the breaking day.

An hour later the Banou, entering the room where Jennifer lay dead, perceived at once what had occurred, and smote her swollen hands together in frank annoyance. The bow-string, doubtless shaken from its hook by the girl's sudden leap upward, had dropped upon her throat; she had perished of its silken sting as surely as if the noose had been fanged or poisoned. She had died of pure fear; extended upon the crimson couch, unclothed save for one garment of clear white lawn, she looked as if some hidden wound had pierced her heart and drained her body of mortality, the colour of which stained the very bed upon which her body slept.

"The Khan will be angry; that cannot be avoided," said the Banou philosophically to her favourite Abyssinian. "Luckily the Georgian virgin

whom my cousin captured yesterday is extremely handsome; prepare the bath at once."

She left the chamber of death, and walked, as swiftly as her huge bulk would permit, in the direction of the prince's cottage. She knocked loudly upon the door; then, receiving no answer, entered at once and without permission.

Abbas had flung himself down in the corridor; the cold blue tiles below his brow were no colder than the hand his mother held between her own. Since he had returned to the house he had not spoken, nor moved save to draw away his hand once or twice; finally he gave up the struggle and lay still, allowing Shekerleb to chafe his fingers; this she continued to do with a certain timid obstinacy. Father O'Donnell stood at some distance from the pair, gazing sadly at his pupil's motionless form; the lines in his face drooped, and it was evident that he was very tired. Each time that Shekerleb attempted to address her son, the priest shook his head without speaking.

"Good morning," cried the Banou in a thick, jocular voice, shoving Abbas's body a little to one side with the toe of her tight Turkish slipper. "How is my little cook to-day, and his lady mother, and O'Donnell Baba the distinguished diplomat? I have missed you, dear prince; your assistants are wretched bunglers one and all. We have not had a decent meal since you left on your pleasure jaunt; I know you will welcome the immediate opportunity of relieving our starvation. To-night, as his loyal subjects must be well aware, the birthday banquet of our beloved ruler takes place; I expect you to exhibit your most poetic skill upon this festive occa-



sion. I have even a small suggestion to make. Do you not consider that a little English lamb, tender and toothsome, might tempt our Kerim's failing appetite? Display your genius, dear Abbas, to-night if ever; dress your lamb with sweet herbs and pistachio nuts, roast her in your silver oven; the Khan will give you half his kingdom for a slice of that delicate flesh!"

The princess turned aside her face and groped blindly for her smelling-salts; Father O'Donnell became very pale, but rather with anger than disgust; his eyes were blue daggers pointed at the Banou's bosom. He strode quickly across the narrow corridor and caught her wrist in an unmerciful grip; his fingers were like metal still hot and convulsive from the fire, but they hardened around her wrist into cold steel. She whined as the fat bulged between their edges.

"How dare you come into this house to torture a helpless child, having already slain one within the hour?" he said terribly, as he alone could speak. "Begone, before I arrogate unto myself the privilege of a higher power; God will deal with you according to your deserts. Go; do not tempt me longer, for I was born a violent man, and have with difficulty subdued my nature."

The Banou looked at him; though unbelievably abandoned and lascivious, she was a brave woman. But Father O'Donnell appalled her; she departed without another word.

"I am afraid she will have you executed immediately," said the princess in a low, sympathetic whisper. "Luckily for me, my dear son is safe from her vengeance; no one can even boil an egg to her

gluttonous taste except the boy. She knows my personal innocence; my grief and amazement on learning of my son's abduction were too plain for suspicion of pretence or complicity. The Banou was almost kind, and seemed to understand my feelings very well, considering the coarseness of her nature; I am horrified at her cruelty to my darling child."

She leaned weeping over Abbas; fears for his reason, for his life even, shook her to the foundations of her little being. The priest looked at her, profound pity making his fierce blue eyes gentler than her own eyes bended on her son.

"Do not disturb him, Khanum," he said softly. "The poor boy's fast asleep. It's no wonder, and he that weary with grief and bewilderment. Put a pillow under his head and leave him be; I'll speak with you in the kitchen."

They stood together by the kitchen table; Shekerleb's preparations for her son's untasted breakfast were pathetically scattered over the well-scrubbed surface; a large sugar-melon had a silver knife still plunged into its rind. The princess looked at Father O'Donnell defiantly; her voice was excited and slightly shrill as she addressed him.

"You know, of course, that I do not consider Abbas in the least to blame," she began, keeping her gaze turned persistently upon the floor. "The girl was far more experienced than he; it was a case of abduction, pure and simple; even the Banou recognised that. My son is the soul of virtue and innocence; of this young woman we know nothing save that she was reckless and impatient, and is now, by reason of her folly, deceased. For my own part, I shall not pretend to a sorrow I cannot feel; I

have my child again, and if I may be granted the happiness of restoring him to health and sanity, I ask no more of heaven. I trust, however, that you will assist me in all things; may I count upon your friendship not to disturb or agitate the boy by undeserved reproaches or regrets? We must never speak of this again in his presence; he cannot bear it."

Father O'Donnell looked thoughtful and sorry as he replied; he probably loved the prince with a love nearly as great as a mother's, but he could not always indorse the lad's conduct with an equally warm approval. He considered an instant before saying firmly, "I am afraid I cannot consent to that to-day."

"You will kill the child; is his life nothing to you?" cried Shekerleb indignantly, her eyes full of tears. The priest smiled bitterly.

"The life of a child is always worth something," he said with sad brevity. The princess did not in the least understand him until he went on, his voice recovering its careful kindness.

"Even the life of this poor girl who now lies dead within the palace is worth a little sorrow, which his youth must inevitably make fleeting, on the part of your son. Had he trusted to my wisdom, which, though faulty, has been ever at his service, he might have been spared the few tears which I shall require him to shed. An hour after I left your dwelling, on the day of the children's disastrous flight, I had learned that the girl's husband was alive and in the hands of a faithful attendant; my opportunities for informing myself as to such matters, are, as

you know, exceptional. At that very moment you were engaged in persuading the mollah to marry these infants according to the rites of Moslem, and Abbas himself, urged quite as much by his own desires as by the importunities of another, was flying northward in forgetfulness of both his mother and his friend. Fortunately I have been able to curb the gossip of the anterooms; the Khan has received the Englishman in full divan, and the most cordial relations prevail between them. Had this gentleman, who I must assure you is a personage of invincible will and well-nigh unbounded power, the faintest conception of the truth, your unlucky country would be plunged into a war with one of the world's greatest nations. The results of such a conflict would be ruinous to your state; England would absorb it like a lion swallowing a honeycomb. You perceive the approaching fate of India; Persia, more helpless and more effete, would fare even worse."

The princess contrived to detach her mind for an instant from the question of whether or not she should risk disturbing her son's slumbers in order to cover him, as a precaution against draughts, with her richest Cashmere shawl. She looked up at Father O'Donnell, a worried frown wrinkling her pretty brows.

"Oh, I hope that you will avoid any trouble with the English envoy," she said hastily. "Though but a babe in arms at the time, the horrors of the Afghan invasion left their indelible print upon my soul, if not upon my memory. You will be seriously to blame, O'Donnell Baba, if you allow this war. And now, if you will excuse me, I think I shall prepare a

little chicken broth against the hour of my son's awakening; it will sustain him in whatever discipline you see fit to impose."

She turned from the priest with every mark of polite disapproval; Father O'Donnell, refraining from even the faintest shrug of the shoulders, such as his long European residence might amply have excused, left the house with a quiet murmur of farewell. In the corridor he stooped over Abbas; the boy was sleeping peacefully.

The priest proceeded slowly across the glittering lawns and between the avenues of oak and cypress; his lips were moving, and from time to time he shook his head so that the thick brown locks were flung from side to side like a savage mane. His blue eyes brooded darkly on the darkness of his own spirit; he was nearer despair than he had ever been before. He was not praying; his moving lips repeated again and again the same words.

"My fault, utterly my fault from beginning to end; I love him, and so I never can believe he is a coward; I might have known; I might have known; I might have known."

In spite of his remorseful bitterness of mood, Father O'Donnell went directly to the doors of the palace and there presented himself with a composed and smiling countenance; he was once more the diplomat. He was received with the utmost courtesy by a certain distinguished official; as the pair passed along the marble corridor the priest glanced curiously at the portals of embossed and gilded wood which concealed the Khan's private council chamber. The official looked important.

"He is closeted with the British Envoy," he



whispered. "A charming man, though somewhat cold and formal. He brings us the most pleasing assurances of his government's good intentions. In the event of any trouble with"—he dropped his voice to inaudibility—"we could, I feel certain, count upon their aid."

After a brief audience with another distinguished official, and a consultation with the head eunuch, the priest left the palace by a side entrance, and returned to his own humble dwelling, where he spent the long languorous June day in fasting and prayer, his thoughts laying the severest chastisement upon him. Finally, towards seven o'clock, he rose from his knees, and walked wearily and, it seemed, unwillingly, in the direction of the prince's cottage. Arrived at the blue-painted door, he hesitated for a moment; his knock when it came was curiously indecisive.

Shekerleb opened the door almost immediately; she had an air of self-importance and placid obstinacy. She looked remarkably pretty; her cheeks were pink and her hazel eyes clear and contented.

"You cannot possibly disturb him now," she said at once, as if she had rehearsed the words, which somewhat lacked her usual urbanity. "He is still asleep. I have given him a little wholesome food and put him to bed; he never really waked, even when I made him get up and go to his own room. I do not believe he remembers a single distressing detail of his terrible experience; exhaustion has mercifully made his mind a blank. I am very thankful for this, though naturally anxious as to his recovery, but the excellent and devout physician whom I have consulted assures me that I have no cause for

real concern. He must be kept absolutely quiet, and shielded from the remotest suggestion of anything unpleasant."

Her manner was more eloquent than her words; her look exceeded courtesy in its contempt. The priest sighed deeply; the sigh was one of obvious relief.

"Very well, Khanum," he answered, "it shall be as you say. I will not importune you for a sight of him until you send for me; count upon my friendship in all things, and be content. If he talks of me, assure him of my unchanged affection."

The princess drank the humility of his words like sweetened wine; she smiled, bowed without speaking, and closed the door with extreme though careful finality.

The priest departed through the sapphire dusk with a firm step; his erect shoulders seemed loosed from some deadly burden, his forehead was lifted broad and white under the sky's serenity. "I'll do it; it's all I can do for her now, and I'll do it," he said aloud, adding softly, under his breath, "Poor boy; I'm thankful he was sleeping. I'll manage somehow; who knows? Maybe an angel will appear to be my acolyte."

To the prince, waking suddenly in his familiar bed, the night was full of noises and portents of despair. The crying of a hungry dog, the unseasonable crowing of a cock, the questioning note of a sleepy bird in the vines without his window, all struck upon his heart in a rush of cold fear, while the wind ruffled his hair and dried the dampness of

his brow. Then with horrible and resistless force his memory returned to him; the atrocious truth blazed in the night like lightning, and he buried his head under his pillow to escape, for a moment's suffocating darkness, the ineluctable reality. Then he sprang shivering from the bed, and flinging a thin cloak over his fine white cotton garments, he opened the window, and, cautious only for silence and the terror of delay, jumped lightly to the ground and ran like a madman in the direction of the palace.

His bare feet made no sound upon the shaven sward; even the longer grasses barely rustled behind his flying heels. Like a madman, like a ghost, like a lost and bewildered bird, he skimmed the surface of the earth, threading the air as if his limbs were of its very substance, and but a swifter portion of itself. He had nearly reached the locked doors of the palace when a light, silvering the obscurity of a cypress grove, made him pause to wonder and perhaps to fear.

Father O'Donnell had erected a small altar in the middle of the cypress grove; upon the altar two great candles were burning behind the mass-book and the bell. The priest had saved from the wreck of his material fortunes only the most magnificent of his vestments; no robes of black or purple remained to him. He stood, tall as a golden tree among the trees of darkness, clad from head to foot in cloth of gold and sumptuous laces, with golden stole and alb and golden chasuble; the cross upon his back was wrought in threads of solid gold. His face was calm and beautiful and sad above the gothic splendour of his raiment; he was a figure from

the deep mystery of the middle ages, superb and barbarous and holy. The altar-cloth was entirely composed of Irish point lace, yellowed and elaborate, studded with thick roses; the candlesticks were of gold. Below the altar the ground was very black along a narrow space; the prince thought he was looking at the shadow of the altar, and then he knew that what he saw was a little grave, open and empty and humble in the enormous earth. Beside the grave, and still more profoundly shadowed by the altar, Jennifer lay in her coffin.

It was no coffin, but merely a shallow chest of fine cedar, with a hinged lid, and faint arabesques of blue and gold colouring its grain. Narrow and shallow as it was, it held room for the child's still fragility and repose. The prince, fallen to his knees in the dark night, could distinguish the small face, like the wax mask of a doll, and the shining hair laid in stiff Byzantine folds about it.

The priest's voice, clear and resonant as a vast bell, swung upward in the words of the Mass.

"*Et introibo ad altare Deo, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meum—*"

The prince lay motionless in the deep grass, while above him the great voice swung like a wave-rocked bell high above the head of a drowned man. Like the whisper from a dead throat the response came faint and drowned.

"*Ite, missa est.*" Father O'Donnell turned from the altar; he closed the lid of the coffin and lifted it as easily as if it held only the body of a little bird. Yet he trembled, for he was not sure who had spoken the responses.

He lowered the coffin into the ground which he had blessed; flinging back the wide lace sleeves of his vestments, he took a new spade in his hands and shovelled the earth upon the coffin lid. The loose earth fell so lightly that the prince did not even hear it fall. Father O'Donnell set the sods carefully back in place, and knelt to pray.

To him as he knelt, crawling through the grass like a hurt animal, came the prince. The priest put his hand for an instant on the boy's shoulder; they knelt together as he prayed.

When Father O'Donnell rose, his great height growing up and up like a gold tree in the darkness, the prince still crouched upon the grave. The priest leaned down to ask him a question. "Leave me," said the prince.

With a gesture more of despair than of benediction, the priest moved away; then returning, he put something into the boy's hand. "If it were any comfort to you, my child—" he said in a voice of little hope and much tenderness.

His tall and sumptuously attired form strode away between the cypresses; he disappeared like a great gold sun among their gloomy trunks and tiered and drooping boughs.

The prince lay stretched at his full length upon Jennifer's grave, his face pressed against the sods which had a faint fragrance of the earth about them. The candles upon the altar were extinguished by the wind and the cypresses appeared to press closer about the grave.

The prince lay face downward in the grass, weeping tears in which a cruel venom of blood and gall were mingled. In one hand he held the Byzantine



image of the Virgin, which Father O'Donnell had put into his hand for a little grain of comfort.

Along the avenues of oak and cypress, and across the shaven lawns came strolling a very tall slender man, dressed entirely in white linen. His uncovered hair shone pale and silvery in the starlight; his face was colourless and composed as marble. In his long thin fingers he held one perfect rose, in whose petals white and cream and pink were subdued to pearliness; as he walked he sniffed at the rose delicately and with an air of abstraction. His head was lifted the better to observe the spiked and glittering stars and to hear the nightingales' voices scattered like fragrance from the blossoming trees of the Khan's garden.

Gerald walked slowly through the lovely darkness; his senses were ravished into a divine calm by its happy influence. He entered the cypress grove with silent footsteps, and stopped, perplexed by the strange sight presented to his view.

Upon an obviously new-made grave lay the body of a young man; he lay as if dead, face downward in the grass. Beside the grave stood a small altar richly furnished with all the appurtenances of the Roman ritual.

Gerald stooped over the young man, and ascertained that he breathed, indeed, but faintly, and with uneven speed. His right hand, relaxed and inordinately slender, held a little object, vaguely distinguishable as a carving in ivory. To Gerald's discerning eye, the thing appeared to be both rare and valuable. He stood for a moment looking down at the pathetic figure of the prince; he lifted his

high nose disdainfully to witness the very evident weakness and prostration of the unhappy boy. He fingered his pocket pistol, a small but deadly weapon of beautiful workmanship, and even, moved perhaps by the romantic and historic associations of the spot, considered with sober amusement the possibility of strangling the unconscious youth. Then, succumbing to one of his rare impulses of pity, he leaned over very quietly and detached the ivory image from the prince's limp fingers with the utmost gentleness and care, taking pains not to waken or in any other manner distress or alarm one so patently in need of repose.

Gerald departed as softly as he had come, meanwhile examining with lively interest the little object which he had just acquired. Its charming face, smaller than his smallest finger-nail, looked up at him; its expression was innocent and vaguely troubled.

"I believe this to be a Byzantine carving of great antiquity," said Gerald to himself complacently as he stepped from the cypress grove into the comparative brightness of the rose-garden. "The face bears a distinct resemblance to my late dear wife; this alone would render it valuable to me, but it is, quite apart from this consideration, an exquisite work of art. I am most fortunate to have procured it at the cost of so little expense or pain."

Wrapping the ivory carefully in a handkerchief of fine white silk, he consigned it to his pocket, and strolled onward, humming an old French air, through the dark and redundant beauty of the palace gardens.

Within the darker shadow of the grove, the

prince lay sleeping; his breath against the grass blades stirred them with scarcely perceptible motion. His breath subsided as the moon rose, and finally, as the cold green moonlight touched his body, ceased altogether to disturb his perfect rest.

THE END

